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the 1990s, the incidence of *S. flexneri* has increased in the United Kingdom [10]. In the United States, *S. flexneri* has been reported to be the most common serotype of *S. flexneri* isolated from children with acute colitis [11].

There is a paucity of data on the epidemiology of *S. flexneri* in the United Kingdom. In the 1970s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated serotype of *S. flexneri* from patients with acute colitis in the United Kingdom [12]. In the 1980s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated serotype of *S. flexneri* from patients with acute colitis in the United Kingdom [13].

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A MODERN GREEK HEROINE.

VOL. I.

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A MODERN GREEK HEROINE

*Μπουρμπαχοκατζουλή με τὴ μακρὲ πλεξούδα,
ἀπὸ πολέμ' ἀντρίστিকা, κὴ ὅς ἦτο κοπελοῦδα.*

Bourbachokátzouli with the long tresses,
Who fought bravely though she was but a girl.
Cretan Poem, "Revolt of the Sfakiotes against Alidakis."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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A MODERN GREEK HEROINE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a rude evening early in February. The north-east wind, which had blown steadily all the day, had, since sunset, become wild and fitful, and a numbing rain had begun to fall, pouring vertically downwards when the wind lulled, whirled along by the blast when a sudden squall burst over the streets and houses.

The Reverend Frederick Sarleigh, B.A., Deacon, junior curate of Saint Adhelms, — Street, S. E., a slight, fair man, with wavy brown hair, soft eyes, and a quiet, meek, benevolent face, had just finished his tea. Rocking himself on the hinder legs of his chair (a schoolboy's trick of which he had not yet cured himself), he de-

bated in his mind whether he should go to evening service, or leave his fellow curate to do duty alone. Despite the noisy warning of the wind, and the rain that beat against his window, it was some time ere he determined to stay at home ; then, a little fresh tea being put into the tea-pot, and the kettle set again upon the hob, he seated himself in his arm-chair between the tea-table and the fire, resolved on enjoying an undisturbed evening's study.

The deacon was distinctly conscious of being comfortable. His little room, its homely furniture, shabby carpet, and tall book-shelves, the faded damask curtains and mahogany side-board, looked cosy and snug in the cheerful lights and shadows made by the leaping flames. As he glanced around him, the cleric bestowed a little Christian pity on those who had to be out in the wet, and laid on his own soul the pleasant unction of humble gratitude for his material comforts. After that, he proceeded to study. "Saint John Chrysostom on the Priesthood" was taken from the corner of the chimney-piece, where it had been placed at tea-time, and the deacon was soon immersed

in Greek. For the little man was far from a dunce.

He read nearly half an hour, and then paused over the great doctor's observation, that it is not enough that clerics be good, they should be intelligent also, much experienced, and no less shrewd about the things of this life than those who live in the world. The book being laid face downwards on his knees, Sarleigh was busily arranging his thoughts, mentally registering, firstly, secondly, thirdly, fourthly, on the fingers of his left hand with the first finger of his right, when a timid knock at the front-door disturbed his meditations. Who could it be that called this inclement evening? As he sat listening, he heard the landlady, Mrs. Twindle, open the door. A murmur of questions and answers ensued. Probably, then, this was one of Mrs. Twindle's friends. They came all with uncertain double knocks. Elsewhere they only ventured on one savage bang, but they wished Mrs. Twindle to understand they were as good as she. A rapping at his own door, however, showed the curate his conjecture was a mistake. The visitor had called to see him.

His book was with reluctance laid aside, and he said, "Come in."

"Please, sir, there is a young person *as wants* to see you," quoth the landlady, after opening the door some ten inches, and poking through the aperture a bony face, surmounted by a mass of wonderful bobbing ornaments, misnamed a cap. "Person" in Mrs. Twindle's speech signified a human being of the feminine gender between seventeen and seven and twenty. The rest of mankind she distinguished as young gals, ladies, boys, gentlemen.

"What is her name?" asked Sarleigh.

"Something foreign, *as* I couldn't catch. Shall I tell her you'll come and see her?"

"Had you not better ask her to come in here?"

Mrs. Twindle puckered up her eyes, mouth, and nose, and shook her head. The deacon understood the gesture. "I will come and speak to her," he said; and, rising from his chair, followed his landlady into the little hall.

A tall girl stood near the door. Her head was bent, and she shrank from the glare of the gas, as if ashamed. Her clothes looked good, and were fashionable, but they were soaked

with rain, the water was literally running down them. Wrapped round her shoulders was a very common cheap shawl, which she clasped in front with one hand—a delicate hand, with slender, pliant fingers, but miserably thin, and blue with cold. As Sarleigh approached, she turned towards him, bowed a trifle stiffly, and looked him straight in the face. As she did so, he saw she was unmistakably handsome. Her dark eyes, indeed, seemed unnaturally large, and their long-fringed lids drooped wearily; her cheeks, too, were hollow, and her lips thin and pallid; but, wasted though it was with want and bitter care, her hungry face was still a face to be remembered—refined, fearless, and impressive.

Her unexpected appearance, her courteous bow, and the piercing gaze that succeeded it, somewhat disconcerted the curate. Most of his visitors were either slouching and shy, or awkwardly rude. He knew who such people were, and how to treat them. How to treat this young lady he did not know. Ought he to return her bow? As he hesitated, she asked—

“Parlez-vous Français, Monsieur?”

A quick glance at Mrs. Twindle simultane-

ously suggested the purport of the question ; then the speaker again looked straight in his face, awaiting his answer.

Sarleigh could not speak French, not enough even to tell her so. He shook his head. But he had understood that she would fain be rid of the landlady, who, he saw, was watching both himself and the stranger with curiosity and unconcealed suspicion. Only it was not easy to get rid of Mrs. Twindle, who "knew better than to be ordered about in her own house." Could the stranger speak nothing but French? Dared he ask her into his sitting-room? Or what was to be done with her? After a very awkward pause, during which she shyly turned her face away, he said,

"I cannot speak French—can you speak any English?"

"Oh, yes. But—can I see you alone?"

She spoke with a slight soft foreign accent. The deacon hesitated, looked askance at his landlady's forbidding face, and then replied, nervously,

"I—could you not tell me what you wish here?"

The stranger hung her head. Her lips part-

ed, as if she was about to speak, but no words followed. After a moment, she lifted her head a little, and looked at Sarleigh from under her eyebrows, a look almost more articulate than speech, that meant, "Do not compel me to speak before this woman."

The man felt that mute appeal, and, allowing better impulses to master his fears about what might be thought of his conduct, timidly invited her into his room.

"Come into my little room," he said, and led the way. The stranger immediately followed. When they had entered, Sarleigh, as he closed the door he had held open for her to pass, felt not much less thankful than his visitor that there was something substantial between them and Mrs. Twindle's curious eyes. The latter only said to herself, "Well, indeed, and he a clergyman, and her wet things all over my carpet, too!" and returned in dudgeon to her own fireside downstairs.

The consciousness of having behaved as he should now made the curate feel more at ease. He pleasantly invited the stranger to take a seat by the fire, and placed a chair for her opposite his own. He went further, and

suggested she should take off her wet shawl. Thanking him, she removed the shawl from her shoulders, and sat down.

"I am not fit to come into anybody's room, I am so wet," she said.

Her pronunciation was not a Frenchwoman's. What she said was true enough. She was so drenched that it was piteous to see her.

"Pray don't apologise," replied Sarleigh, taking his seat opposite her; "you wanted to speak to me."

"If you please. I have been told that you are kind, and I am in great trouble."

She paused abruptly.

"Please tell me what your trouble is."

"I am so ashamed to have to tell you," and she hung her head, "but I have no money, no food, no home, no friends—I have nothing. I have had nothing to eat to-day. I have nowhere to go to-night."

She spoke hurriedly, without raising her eyes from the ground, as though she was ashamed of what she said, and wished to get to the end of it.

Sarleigh was silent. Hers was such a commonplace story. He saw people every day

who had no home, no food, no friends, no money, or said so. Already experience had taught him that professional beggars come to their point without wasting time. They have so many calls to pay, they cannot afford to waste time. And this young woman came to her point in a trice, and never once looked in his face while she was speaking; and that she could look people in the face when she chose he had seen. On the other hand, it was patent that she was hungry and cold, and she did look like a lady. As he was musing what he should reply, she continued—

“I am sorry indeed to come to trouble you, and so ashamed; I am so ashamed. I would not have come, but I was told that you are very kind. If you would be kind to me, and help me, please.”

She had a soft, clear voice that was pleasant to hear, and the tone in which she pleaded was very touching.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Marie Vinet.”

“You are French?”

“No”—she hesitated a little—“Marie Vinet is not my real name.”

"A lady with an *alias*. This is a bad beginning," thought the circumspect deacon, and he asked, "What is your real name?"

"Bourbachokátzouli Valettas."

"I beg your pardon; would you mind telling me again?"

She repeated the name, and added, in explanation, "It is a Greek name; I am by birth a Cretan."

Remembering an ill-natured estimate of Cretans, reported by St. Paul to be due to one of themselves, Sarleigh offered her a piece of paper and a pencil, saying,

"Will you kindly write your name on this? If you are a Greek, write it in Greek."

There was a faint difference in his voice. He felt very suspicious, and the girl noticed it. On the paper she wrote in a thin, small hand—

Μαυραδαζουλι Βαλέττας.

The deacon took up the paper.

"I cannot read it," he said, after scrutinizing it for nearly a minute.

"You asked me to write in Greek."

"So this is her notion of Greek, is it?" thought Sarleigh, convinced that Marie Vinet, *alias* Bourbachokátzouli Valettas was attempting to hoax him. He pushed the "Saint John Chrysostom on the Priesthood" towards her, and said,

"You are a Greek; can you read that?"

"I can read it, but I don't know the meanings of all the words. I have lived long in France, and have almost forgotten Greek."

"Read a piece, then. Begin at the top of the page."

She began reading some jargon that sounded like *Váthisis anepitthevtos kai aschimátistos phooní*; then her eye caught the deacon's incredulous smile, and she stopped short.

"Monsieur," she said, anxiously, "you do not believe me, and I have been telling you the truth."

"What you have written here is not Greek writing, and you cannot read Greek."

She made him no answer, only rose from her seat and began wrapping the wet shawl about her shoulders. There was a proud and bitter look in her face; still, when she spoke, it was quietly enough.

"I am sorry I have troubled you. I should not have come had I not been advised to do so. I hope you will pardon me."

But the curate was not going to let her off so easily. He meant her to see what a sifting he would give her before he turned her out.

"Do not go yet," he interposed; "sit down and tell me where you have been living."

She did not sit down again, nor immediately answer. After a time she replied,

"In Clayton Street, number seven; it was the people there, people called Hudson, who advised me to come to you."

"Clayton Street is a low street, and the Hudsons are not respectable people."

Bourbachokátzouli Valettas was silent. The curate continued,

"How came *you* to be living in such a place? *You* have not always been in this state."

"I got into trouble, great trouble," she replied hurriedly, evidently wounded by what had just been said.

"What trouble?"

"If I tell you, will you help me? If you will, I will tell you everything *truly*. But I am

tired. I have been asked so many questions to-day."

She rested her hand on the edge of one of the bookshelves behind her, and lent back as if almost too fatigued to stand unsupported. It was but for a moment, and she stepped away from the shelf, saying, hastily,

"I beg your pardon, I hope I have not wetted your books."

For her look of pitiable weariness the man, as a man, pitied her. But he was a cleric as well as a man, and the clergy are so mercilessly duped that they become in turn merciless in investigations.

"If you will tell me all and truly, I will do what I can for you," replied Sarleigh, not very encouragingly. After a few seconds, she said,

"Did *you* ever have to beg for anything, to beg and pray very hard for it, when you wanted it dreadfully, when others could give it if they would, and you were ready to drop for shame that you had to ask it?"

Her great sad eyes met his scrutinizing gaze. Either she was a most accomplished actress, or she was really in need. But the deacon had been monstrously hoaxed only three days

before, and was determined not again to be overreached.

"I asked you to tell me the truth about your getting into trouble," he repeated.

"I was a governess. I lost my situation, I have not been able to get another, and I am without money and friends."

"You said just now you were a Greek."

"And I saw you disbelieved me. My father was a Cretan. He was killed in a rebellion. He sent me to Paris to be educated. After his death I feared to return home, and became governess to some English people, called Noall, travelling on the Continent. When they did not want me any longer they dismissed me, here in London, where they happened to be spending a few weeks. I have tried to get other work, but I am quite lost in London. I have spent all the money I had. I pawned"—her voice faltered—"all I could, and now I have nothing left."

"Why did Mr. Noall dismiss you?"

"He did not want a governess any longer."

"Can you give me his address?"

"Yes, if you wish for it. But it is of no use."

They have left London, and gone abroad again."

"You slept last night in Clayton Street. Why can you not go back there? Do you owe rent?"

"No. But I will not go back to Clayton Street. I cannot tell you why, but I will not."

The deacon paused to consider. Miss Vallettas' account of herself was unsatisfactory, pre-eminently so. She was probably an impostor. If so, a clever one. But if not an impostor? That was the rub! And she was in many ways different from anyone he had had to deal with before. At length he said,

"If you will give me Mr. Noall's London address, I will write to him, and if I get a satisfactory answer, I will see that you shall be assisted, will try to get you work. Only you must give me time to make inquiries, and—pray where are you going now, if, as you say, you are not going home?"

He meant this question to convince her that he had found her out. She merely looked down on the ground, and said, coolly,

"To drown myself."

"You do not know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do," she retorted, quickly. "I can get no work, I can get no help, I have no money, and I shall drown myself."

Her pale thin lips closed tightly with determination. She stooped gracefully to gather up her dress, and, without again looking at Sarleigh, turned to leave the room. The deacon was alarmed, but not convinced that the whole affair was not a well-acted trick.

"Why should you think of such a wicked action?" he asked. "You can get help, if you truly need it, in many ways: there are the police, the guardians of the poor, many charitable societies, and so on." He proceeded to explain at length the different organizations and public and private charities of London, and to allude to the number of impostors and the great need of circumspection in assisting unknown persons. Before long she interrupted him, in a bitter, petulant tone,

"Of course. This is what I have heard several times to-day. Only I do not understand these things. I have done nothing wrong. I am utterly perplexed. If you will not help me, let me go. Listen: This morn-

ing, when I saw that I had nothing left, I said to myself, I will call upon all the people I know, or of whom I have been told that they would help me. If no one *will* help me, I shall drown myself. At the governesses' agency they told me they had not yet found any work for me. I asked them to return the money I left as a deposit; they refused, and were almost rude. From the agency I went to Mr. Noall's house. They have all returned to the Continent. I walked to Paddington, and called there on a friend of theirs I met abroad. She was very polite, but did not believe me any more than you do, and she gave me this." (She threw a mendicity ticket on the table.) "I do not know what it is, nor what use to make of it; you may keep it, if you like. Thence I went to the houses of two clergymen. One asked me a number of questions, and then talked to me, precisely as you have done, about impostors. The other was out. I waited in his hall till he returned, nearly three hours. Then all he said to me was, 'You do not live in my parish—I cannot assist you.' I begged him at least to advise me what to do, but he replied he had not time to listen. When I left him, it was

dark, and it had begun to rain. After I again crossed the river to come to you, I lost my way, and have been a very long way round to get here. I have"—her voice trembled—"been insulted in the street twice since dark. I have stood, and walked, and answered questions all day. I have not had a morsel of food, and I have been humiliated in a way that might break the spirit of any woman for ever. Still I hoped, because I know you have been kind to people. That was why I came to you last. You will not help me, and I have no more hope. I am tired of a life that has no hope. Anyhow, I do not mean to endure such another day as this, and so I must drown."

She shrugged her shoulders, and drew the shabby shawl tighter round her. Sarleigh took half a crown from his pocket and said,

"Take this and get yourself a lodging somewhere, and"—pointing to the table, where the bread and butter and tea-things still remained—"have something to eat. I will make you some warm tea."

She was evidently surprised, but shook her head.

"No," she said, "no, thank you. You are

kinder than the others have been, but, you know, one meal and this little bit of money will not help me. It will only be to-morrow morning instead of to-night, and I am hardened to it now."

She looked hardened, desperate.

"Let me beg you to pause and think before you proceed to commit so hideous a crime."

"I have thought, and decided."

"Have you thought of the awful punishment that will follow? You will lose your soul."

"I shall go to hell. Well, I cannot help it."

She looked anxiously this way and that, and her fingers, twitching nervously, betrayed the agitation she was struggling to conceal.

"When you sit by your hearth by-and-by," she said, pointing to it, "so warm and comfortable, think of me, hungry, cold, and hopeless, drowning in your dirty river, and then burning—oh, God!—in that dreadful fire."

She stepped to the door, her hand was on the handle to open it, and then suddenly, with a cry, more like that of some wild beast in an agony than any human utterance, she sank on the nearest chair, and, hiding her face in her little hands, burst into a passion of tears.

Sarleigh stood by watching her with the embarrassment of a man unaccustomed to see women in trouble. When, after a while, her sobbing abated a little, he said,

“Don’t cry so bitterly.”

“Not cry!—why not? I am so young to die, and I dread the water, but I cannot help it,” and she went on sobbing.

Her tears at any rate gave him time to think. If she should do as she said, and if what she had told him, improbable as it seemed, was true, how would he quiet his conscience, he who might have saved her? Should he send for a policeman? If he did, and discovered afterwards that she had not deceived him, how would he have to think of his own behaviour to a young woman who had appealed to his manliness in her last necessity. Should she leave him, had he any chance of knowing whither she went, any power to prevent her carrying out her threat of self-destruction? As her sobs again subsided he approached her, and touched her shoulder gently.

“Do not cry. I perhaps can assist you,” he said.

“No, it cannot be helped. I ought to have

foreseen it, and drowned myself in the Seine long ago."

She spoke quickly, and as quickly rose. Before he knew what she was about she was gone from the room, and was in the hall. He followed her, hesitating, meaning to detain her, unable to imagine how. But, quicker than he, she hurriedly opened the door, and would have been in the street, had not a sudden gust of wind, that swept round the corner, driven the torrent of rain and hail it bore directly into her face, with such violence that she shut her eyes and involuntarily shrank back. The curate saw the sleet dashed against the girl's defenceless face, saw the drenching, driven rain pouring in torrents around her, and felt that, ensue what might, he could not turn a woman out, perhaps to go to her death, on such an evening as this. He caught her wet arms (how thin they were!) and forcibly drew her back into the hall. When the door was closed again he expostulated with her.

"You cannot go out whilst it pours as it does now."

"What does it matter how it pours? I shall be wet enough in the river."

"Hush!"

"Bah! How can you be guilty of such foolery, saying 'Hush!' and looking shocked, when you won't do anything to help me?"

"I will do—anything to help you."

The die was cast. He had had the words on his lips twenty times, had known he wanted to help her even when he most distrusted her. Now it was said he was happier. She looked at him incredulously, and asked,

"Really—after all?"

"Yes, really. You shall have food and shelter. I will do all I can."

It was a pleasure to him to say it, to promise her much.

"You are not meaning to hand me over to the police, nor to do anything of that kind, nor to give me one night's shelter, and then turn me out into the street again."

"No, indeed I am not. I will help you to— to get back to the life you used to lead before you got into trouble, Miss Valettas. Come, now, and have something to eat."

The magic of being called by name, that gentle expression of regard, won her, and she followed him back to his room. There he took

her shawl, and hat, and cloak from her. He bade her sit in the arm-chair, and, whilst she was engaged in warming her hands, hastened to make her some fresh tea.

"Eat only a little at first," he said, as he set the bread and butter before her, "it is so long since you have taken anything. By-and-by you shall have a light supper."

She thanked her host gracefully and prettily as he waited on her, and, as he moved about the room, watched him, catching sometimes his eyes furtively glancing at herself. Yet she clearly did not care to talk, and sat silently sipping her tea, or pensively gazing into the fire.

CHAPTER II.

MEANWHILE Sarleigh wondered what he was going to do with his embarrassing protégée. It would be sufficiently easy in the course of time to find her some fitting asylum, but he was enormously puzzled how to provide for her immediate accommodation. To have saved a desperate girl from self-destruction was so undoubtedly grand that it was annoyingly ridiculous not to know afterwards what to do with her.

She must sleep somewhere, and she could not sleep where she was. When, a few weeks before, one of his sisters had come to visit him, he had given her his bed-room and got himself a room at a house on the opposite side of the

street. He might secure the same rooms for Miss Valettas. When her tea was finished, he begged her to excuse him for a few minutes, and left her by the fire, promising shortly to return.

It was still raining when he went out. The distance he had to go was small, yet far enough to give him time to be sensible that, for an indefinable cause, there existed a strange difference between the unconcern with which he had engaged these rooms for himself, and a certain nervous timidity he had about taking them for Miss Valettas. Nor was the air, with which the proprietress of the rooms, one Mrs. Tidgin, vouchsafed to listen to his proposals, at all re-assuring. On his asking whether he could have the ground floor sitting-room and bed-room for a few days, Mrs. Tidgin's great red face became a dimpled ocean of smiles: when he added "for a young lady," it changed to a wrinkled waste of forbidding surprise, with the abruptness peculiar to the moveable slides of a magic lantern.

Without hesitation the good woman informed his reverence she did not care for lady-lodgers. In fact, she would not have them. They "made

so much work," and were always "about the place." She must know all about a young lady before she admitted her under her roof. She should expect two references. The first difficulty was surmounted by a suggestion of somewhat higher rent, in consideration of which the widow vouchsafed to waive her general objection to ladies. It crossed the deacon's mind that a second augmentation of the rent might stand in lieu of references, and a third supply the place of satisfactory antecedents. In this he was probably right, but not having the courage boldly to make the impudent proposition, he promised that the references should be forthcoming on the following day, and recklessly volunteered to supply any information Mrs. Tidgin might desire. But she questioned him so closely that he soon perceived any attempt to answer her must end in admissions justifying a refusal to receive Miss Valettas. Finding his embarrassment was becoming momentarily more suspicious, and being frightened lest he should clumsily disclose the real state of things, the deacon determined to cut the conversation short. And thus it befel that, casting about him for something to say, he committed himself, almost un-

wittingly, to the unfailing expedient of an opposite lie.

"Miss Valettas was a friend of his sister's. Mrs. Tidgin's asking so many questions about a personal friend of Miss Sarleigh's was preposterous."

It was a much larger lie than he had contemplated, but he could not have told a better one. It left Mrs. Tidgin defenceless, and saved him the infliction of further investigations. The rooms were secured, and fires lighted in both. After a dozen times assuring the widow that everything was all right, Sarleigh took his departure. On his homeward way he realized and digested the pleasant fact that, having once said Miss Valettas was his sister's friend, he would most likely have to repeat it. Widow Tidgin would tell Mrs. Twindle, and Mrs. Twindle every soul in the parish. Seeing that the falsehood was likely to become current coin, with a view to making it as small as he could, he determined that very night to write a letter to his favourite sister, making the best of his new acquaintance, and begging her to take a friendly interest in the poor desperate Greek.

When he got home, as he opened the door

with his latch-key, before the aperture between door and door-post was three inches wide, there fell on his ears the shrill voice of his landlady raised to its highest pitch, abusing somebody in most unmeasured terms. For an instant he imagined that Lucy, the maid-of-all-work, must be receiving one of her many jobations in the hall instead of the back kitchen. But when he entered, and perceived that the sounds issued from his own room, the door of which was open, and that the maid-of-all-work, with a delighted grin on her dirty face, was peering round the corner of the kitchen stairs, he realised that not she but his protégée was the unfortunate at present under the lash of Mrs. Twindle's stygian tongue.

Pressing his latch-key on his lips, he too stood and listened.

"Him and you—him and you's two nice ones, isn't you? As you thinks, no doubt. *That* you are. And your skirts all mucky wet, and you a sitting there, that cheeky, there, in your nasty wet rags."

"Yes, they are very, very wet," replied a soft voice that had a faint foreign ring; "I did think it would be much better to send them

downstairs to be dried, only I did not like to ring."

"You ring—you! Me have them things downstairs—me dry—your d——d impudence."

At this juncture Sarleigh appeared in the doorway. After he had gone, the landlady, hearing the door close and supposing it closed behind Miss Valettas, bade her maid go and fetch Mr. Sarleigh's tea-things. The maid did not obey at once, and when she went she found Bourbachokátzouli sleeping in the arm-chair. Worn out with fatigue and excitement, she had dropped asleep a minute or two after Sarleigh left. The girl immediately ran downstairs to her mistress, and said,

"Oh, lor! ma'am, there's a strange young person asleep up in Mr. Sarleigh's room, and she's a-took all her things off, and hanged 'em upon a chair."

Mrs. Twindle rushed upstairs. Miss Valettas she found, asleep indeed, but not in the state Lucy described. Only her wet hat and cloak and shawl hung on the back of a chair, where Sarleigh had placed them. For a minute or two, the great bony woman stood, in speechless indignation, staring at the pale sleeping

stranger. At last her feelings found vent in words.

"Well I'm blest!" After a pause followed, "But I'm not a-going to stand this here. Young woman, wake up."

The sleeper did not move. Mrs. Twindle approached, took her by the shoulders, and shook her till she awoke. Startled out of a weary sleep, she scarcely remembered where she was, and, bewildered at seeing a tall, angry woman standing over her, murmured some imperfectly articulated French.

"I don't want none of your lingo, as can talk English as well as me when you *chooses*. Now then, you just put on your things and be off, will you, please. I'm not a-going to have any goings on here. Don't you be a-looking at me that stupid neither, now, as if you *wasn't* able to understand. You just pick up your things and be off, or I sends for some one to take you."

"Je ne comprends pas, mais——"

"I don't want none of that there. *Him and you* have not been talking none of that, I knows. As ought to be ashamed of hisself bringing the likes of you in here for company, and calls hisself a clergyman."

"I do not understand. I was waiting for Mr. Sarleigh to return, and I fell asleep."

"You was waiting for him, *was* you? Well, I never. You was waiting for him. I never heard the likes of you for impudence. I suppose he told you to wait?"

Mrs. Twindle's curiosity even exceeded her indignation.

"Yes. May I ask why you awaked me?"

"Why I waked you? Well, I never! And did you suppose I was a-going to let you sleep here. Now you just take up your things, and be off, my girl."

"Be off! What do you mean?"

"I mean you'll leave here, double quick march, my girl, this minute, or I goes for the police."

"What a fearful woman!" thought Bourbachokátzouli, far from clear who Mrs. Twindle was. "Who can she be? Not Mrs. Sarleigh. Yet I have heard that some clergymen's wives are more like cooks than ladies. If she is Mrs. Sarleigh, I shall be turned out, after all." She asked, timidly,

"Are you Mrs. Sarleigh?"

"What?"

"Are you Mrs. Sarleigh?"

"I don't want none of your sauce, now, as *knows* I ain't no such thing."

Miss Valettas felt re-assured. She was by this time wide awake, and able to think who this strange personage could be. She remembered seeing her before. Where? At the door. She was the landlady, of course. How stupid not to have thought of that! Her face brightened, and a little smile played round her lips, as she said, leaning back in her chair with a non-chalant air, and looking condescendingly at Mrs. Twindle,

"I suppose you are the landlady. What is your name?"

"My name's Twindle, as will let you know, young woman, if you don't get out of this here."

"Then, Mrs. Twindle, will you be so kind as to fetch some coals. There are none here, and the fire is getting low."

"No, I shan't fetch no coals. Do you——"

"If you don't fetch them soon, the fire will go out, and, when Mr. Sarleigh comes back, you will have to light it again."

"Look here, young woman, you just get up and walk out of this here."

"I don't think, Mrs. Twindle," said her pro-

voking tormentor, taking from the chimney-piece a Japanese fan, and beginning to fan herself, "I don't think you understand that Mr. Sarleigh is a friend of mine, and that I am waiting till he comes back to have supper with me."

"Mr. Sarleigh ought to be ashamed of himself, and he call himself a clergyman."

Miss Valettas, who by this time not only understood the situation, but was beginning to enjoy the joke, now said, as provokingly as she could,

"Don't you think, my good woman, that you had better go downstairs?"

"Me!" Mrs. Twindle's passionate sentences became an incoherent tirade of, "Ordered about in her own house! A disreputable vagabond out of the street! The likes of her! Calling himself a clergyman!" and other broken phrases jumbled together.

"Still," interposed Bourbachokátzouli, at last, "I think you had better go downstairs."

"Indeed. I suppose so that him and you can go on just as you please up here."

"No, not for that," replied the girl, laughing, "but because, my good woman, I am afraid you are not quite in a fit state to be seen."

She put the fan before her face, and looked over the top of it at Mrs. Twindle, with eyes sparkling with mischief. This was the climax. Mrs. Twindle's indignation became inexpressible, and the language in which she attempted to find vent for her outraged feelings unproduced. Happily Miss Valettas had not acquired her knowledge of English under circumstances that could enable her to understand the meaning of many words the landlady used. So she sat still in the arm-chair, quivering with laughter, fanning herself, and making provoking remarks whenever the angry woman was compelled to pause for want of breath, till she had baited the savage old fiend into such a paroxysm of rage that the latter knew neither what she was saying nor where she was. In the midst of this Sarleigh returned, and, having comprehended what was going on, stepped into the room as Mrs. Twindle was seriously meditating proceeding from words to blows.

"Mrs. Twindle," he said, "I think you must be forgetting yourself."

"*Me* forgetting myself; no, it's not *me's* forgetting myself, but them as calls themselves my betters as forgets themselves." Here en-

sued a tremendous gasp for breath. "Her and you. It's not me forgets myself—oh, no! *Her* there, of course she don't forget herself, nor you don't forget yourself—oh, no!"

But when she proceeded, after abusing him for five minutes or more, to speak of the stranger in terms that made the colour come into his cheeks, he pulled the landlady out of the room, and, despite her ceaselessly clattering tongue and frenzied rage, by degrees brought her to terms.

"You know you spent on yourself," he said, "thirty shillings your husband gave you for the rent, and I lent you the money that you should not get into trouble. Now, Mrs. Twindle, if I have any of this nonsense, I'll tell your husband."

She did not care for thirty shillings, nor three hundred shillings, nor three thousand shillings, nor three million shillings—not she!—nor yet for him, nor her, nor Twindle, nor anyone else.

"Very well," said Sarleigh. He called the maid, and bade her fetch Mr. Twindle (he was a blacksmith) from his forge. Still the blacksmith's wife asserted that she did not care.

But when his heavy tread sounded in the hall, and she bethought her of how thick and strong were his brawny arms, and how heavy his fire-scorched hands, whilst Sarleigh affirmed that he was going to ask for the return of the thirty shillings on the spot, Mrs. Twindle's courage failed.

"Oh, lor, sir," she said, "don't you go for to tell him."

"I'll tell Mr. Twindle if I have any more scenes about Miss Valettas."

Mrs. Twindle cried repentance and amendment, and began to howl and sob. The blacksmith entered.

"Twindle," said the deacon, "I am sorry to send for you, when I know you are working late to finish a job, but Mrs. Twindle has been very rude to a young lady who is in my rooms."

"You've been at the drink again, Betsy," said the blacksmith; "that makes the third time I've found you out. I'm very sorry, sir, and hopes you'll please to overlook it. I be ashamed of you, Betsy, that I be. You go to bed, and don't make no more disturbances."

Mrs. Twindle went to bed, under an undeserved imputation of tippling, promising her-

self to be revenged on both "him and her—her that saucy, and him calling hisself a clergyman!"

CHAPTER III.

SARLEIGH rejoined Miss Valettas. He apologised in the amplest terms for what had occurred. To his surprise, she appeared more amused than either alarmed or offended.

"Your landlady seems to be a charming woman," she said. "How did you find such a pleasant person to live with? I never enjoyed anything more. But I wish she would have dried my cloak and shawl."

During supper, the cloak and shawl were dried, or partially dried, before the kitchen fire by the good-natured, much-enduring Lucy, mistress downstairs now Mrs. Twindle had retired to bed. With the same patient soul's assistance, Sarleigh contrived to offer his still hungry guest a very palatable little meal, to which she did ample justice. She was still too

tired, or too cautious, to talk much, but several of her remarks struck her host as more than slightly inconsistent with the despair of two hours before. She observed, for instance, that the scene with his landlady was worth all she had endured in the earlier part of the day; and that she could have borne her minor misfortunes with greater equanimity if the wind had not demolished her unfortunate umbrella at the very time the rain began. On Sarleigh's mentioning, with much hesitation and various expressions of regret, that in an unfortunate moment, through his anxiety to make everything pleasant, he had been betrayed into what he feared was a falsehood, in fact, had said she was a friend of his sister's, she naïvely replied,

"Ah, yes, that was a very good idea."

Supper ended, the deacon proposed that they should go together to Widow Tidgin's. All circumstances being taken into consideration, the provision of distinct lodgings for the girl was both the most seemly arrangement the curate could have planned, and the most congenial to a gentlewoman's sense of decorum. But timid inexperience always does and says too much,

and Sarleigh imagined he owed his guest an apology for not giving her a bed in the house whilst he himself went to sleep elsewhere. Whilst she put on her half-dried things, she was therefore doomed to listen to as ill-imagined an explanation of her protector's plans and motives as ever annoyed a woman's ear, an explanation in which the deacon (who had not seen how impossible it was till he had commenced it) blundered out one insensate thing after another, and concluded with, "only you know, Miss Valettas, I thought that appearances, don't you know—so that, as I said, though I am ashamed that you should have to go out again in the cold, yet—I hope—I hope you don't mind."

Instead of replying to this farrago of senselessness, Miss Valettas observed, with very practical sang-froid,

"There is certain to be a bother about my having no luggage. Will you say you know all about it? You can tell the landlady it is at a railway-station or something of that sort, and that it will come to-morrow."

"But, in the first place, I don't know anything about your luggage, if you have any,

and, in the next, all this is surely deliberate untruthfulness."

Miss Valettas shrugged her shoulders.

"Really, mon ami," she said—the deacon looked at her with amazement—"yes, you are mon ami, and a good friend you have been too in my necessity (I shall not forget it), but really you are very scrupulous. I'll tell the fibs about the luggage, if you like, but the woman won't believe me as she would you. And if you could lend me a hand-bag? there need not be anything in it, only for the sake of appearances, as you said just now. A lady without luggage, you know, is a thing nobody believes in."

The tone of this speech sorely tried Sarleigh's faith in her. "I believe she is an impostor, after all," quoth he to himself, as he went to fetch the bag; "and if so, what a fool I have been again." Yet he brought her a small hand-bag, and had put a brush and comb in it. As he gave it her, he asked,

"Can you be serious?"

"Yes, mon ami."

"Then understand that it is not right to tell falsehoods, and I, at any rate, do not choose to tell them."

"But if it is necessary?"

"It never is necessary to do wrong."

"It is sometimes necessary to tell fibs," replied the incorrigible Bourbachokátzouli.

The cleric turned away. At this instant Miss Bourbachokátzouli Valettas, *alias* Marie Vinet, *alias*, her protector just then suspected, at least half a dozen other names, owed to his having sisters, and to nothing else, that she did not, after all, go to the bottom of the Thames that February evening. Did then some passing tender recollection of the gentle girls at home prompt him to be forbearing with her who might be another's darling sister? That would have been very touching! but the prosaic truth was only that the gentle girls at home often told fibs, fat fibs, as girls will, gentle or ungentle; and, though far from acknowledging the failing with Bourbachokátzouli's portentous candour, had yet so far initiated their brother into the multiformity of the feminine conception of truth that he was much less shocked than he pretended to be by Miss Valettas' duplicity. And so it happened that the deacon's untruth about his sisters being Miss Valettas' friends proved true in a way, though not as he

meant it ; for, had it not been for his experience of them, he would then have refused to have had any more to do with her. As it was, he was rather sorry than surprised. Yet men do very ill to let women think they do not expect truth from them.

He next offered her some money, two half-sovereigns and a pound's worth of silver. "You may want some money, it is so awkward to be quite without it," he said, unconscious that he was being guilty of the duplicity he had but just condemned, and that truth would have had him say, "Miss whatever your name may be, seeing I do entirely mistrust you, I offer you this money ; partly in order to discover how much you will take, and partly to make it worth your while to be off without giving me any further trouble, if, as I suspect, you have come here to see what you can get."

"You are very generous," she said. "I certainly shall not want so much as that."

"Take as much as you like."

She slowly took five shillings in small coins, and out of it returned sixpence to him, saying,

"Please give the girl this for drying my cloak. I am sure she must have a hard life

with your landlady. And remember I owe you five shillings. Should I some day be able, it will be a pleasure to me to return it."

After that his faith in her revived a little. At Mrs. Tidgin's it did prove necessary to tell some fibs about the luggage. In the heat of the argument the curate told his share. It was well that he had been warned, for he had had no idea what a profound impression the want of luggage would produce on Widow Tidgin. But by dint of—"persuasion" call it—she was satisfied at last, and he bade Miss Valettas good night, promising her some breakfast in the morning, after which they were to proceed to make further arrangements.

"Ah! yes," she replied, indifferently, "I suppose something must be arranged. Good night."

But, as he was leaving the room, she suddenly approached him, and, dropping on her knees, caught his hand, and kissed it two or three times. He would have expostulated and turned to raise her from the floor, but she had sprung up and left the room before he had time to do either.

A bright fire burnt in her bed-room, and so

soon as she had divested herself of some of her wet things—the still damp shawl, the mud-splashed skirts, and the thin, high-heeled French boots that had so ill protected her feet from the wet and mire, she sat in the wicker arm-chair near the rustling blaze, and seemed to take counsel with herself. Not long nor hopefully, for, after yawning once or twice, she rose again, with a sigh and a shake of her head, and began to undress.

And her benefactor, too, not sorry to be alone, and to have time to think whether he had done a noble or a foolish thing, sat by his fireside, at least not haunted by visions of a girl fighting the suffocating water into which her despair had plunged her. His reverie was longer far than hers. The clocks struck midnight as he stood, with his back to the fire, with a face still expressive of perplexity and uncertainty.

His thoughts were haunted by the story of a cruel thing that did happen in London not many years ago. Under circumstances very analogous to Miss Valettas', a young woman, a governess, homeless, penniless, friendless, drowned herself in the Thames. She had come,

if he rightly remembered, from America to Liverpool with the family that employed her. On their arrival in England she was discharged, the reason alleged being that her services were no longer required. She was advised to come to London, because work there was easily obtainable. The journey cost her a large portion of her very slender store. Arrived in London, unknown, bewildered by the great strange city, she soon expended what remained, and without having once had any prospect, the most remote even, of employment, paid all she owed and preferred a leap from Waterloo Bridge to a woman's other last resource. On whose soul God have mercy.

“Was it not pitiful?

In a whole cityful!”

But if she had asked for help at your house, reader, or mine, should we have believed her, have given or found her shelter for even a few days? “If I had known!” If he had known, is there one among the millions of London who would *not* have helped her? It is to be hoped there is not. But as none could have had any more assurance than was to be gathered from the poor girl's own assertion of her misfor-

tunes what would have been actually done?

We must have *felt* like the deacon, whose looks confessed that he could come to no conclusion as to whether the young woman who had cast herself on his charity was an impostor or not. Should we have *acted* as generously?

He certainly had either saved a girl, a ruined one she might be, in the hour of her helpless despair, or had been vulgarly, ridiculously hoaxed. To find that out did not take long, but to discover which, and to decide what his next step should be. When sheer sleepiness at last bade him go to bed, he had not yet the appearance of a man who had determined to persevere in the course to which he stood committed.

CHAPTER IV.

NINE o'clock struck, half-past nine, ten, and still the curate sat by his breakfast-table, waiting for his guest. He was becoming very hungry, and very suspicious. If, after all, she had decamped with—four and sixpence! That was scarcely likely. But if she had, he was cheaply rid of her, and no further anxiety would ensue, and nevertheless he would be sorry. Yet surely, if she was an impostor, she would have made an attempt to appropriate more than four and sixpence. She might have robbed Widow Tidgin. That would be pleasant for him, excessively so. He had contemplated going across the street and making some inquiries; whether she was awake? whether she had understood she was to breakfast with him? whether she had forgotten it, or imag-

ined, he breakfasted later? But when the possibility of her turning out a thief presented itself, he prudently determined to risk no inquiries at Mrs. Tidgin's.

She might have taken liberties with his own drawers and cupboards. He had left her alone in the room more than once, and for considerable spaces of time, and she had perhaps availed herself of the opportunity to possess herself of what she pleased; for, like many men fresh from the University, he was excessively careless about locks and keys. So forcibly did this idea impress him that he began rummaging about the room, noticing which drawers had been left open, and which were locked, counting his spoons, and examining his money. In the middle of the investigation a light hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Mon ami, are you searching to find out whether I stole anything?"

This was so exactly what he was doing that the curate coloured crimson to the roots of his hair, and began stammering an excuse.

"No fibs, mon ami."

She turned from him to look out of the window at the dirty little back garden, in which

the blacksmith kept lumber and old iron, and where nothing grew except weeds and some ragged, long-stemmed, box that showed where the flower-beds used to be. As soon as the deacon got over his confusion, he came to her side. A look of pain had succeeded the saucy smile with which she questioned him. Her lips quivered, and her eyes were brimming with tears.

"I have not yet wished you good morning," he said, offering his hand. "I think you are already looking better. I hope you slept well."

She made no reply, nor even looked round.

"What is the matter, Miss Valettas?"

Still silence.

"Miss Valettas, I beg you will tell me if anything has annoyed you."

"No, nothing."

"That is not true."

"Well, then, my thoughts are my own."

"So you will not tell me what is making you unhappy?"

"Yes, I will. I was thinking. Oh! no, I beg your pardon. Of course you don't suppose I can think. Most men suppose women cannot. *I was* thinking, though, that if one is to have

the credit of being a thief, and an adventuress, a vagabond, a storyteller, and I know not what else, whether it would not be wiser to be a few of these things. I suppose something is to be gained by stealing, and cheating, and humbugging, or people would not persevere in it. The mere character is not a pleasant one to have, as I have learnt by experience. Only, if I am to enjoy the ugly character, I don't see why I should not reap the advantages as well as the annoyances of the situation."

"Surely, Miss Valettas, there is a difference between being bad and being thought so."

"It is not being good or bad that makes much difference in people's opinion of you, nor in the way they treat you. And afterwards to have to cringe to them to live! Ah, me!"

Her lips curled with scorn as she tossed her head, and stepped away from the window. But the next instant she turned quickly round, and said, holding out her hand,

"Thank you kindly for the first quiet night's rest I have had for weeks. Only, Mr. Sarleigh—you'll never be so cruel again—as to suspect a girl—with a taste for tragic sentiment—of punctuality at breakfast time!"

Her voice broke into a clear, ringing laugh, whilst the tears still sparkled on her eyelashes. Sarleigh, who was preparing to assert loudly that he never, never would be so cruel again, felt as if he had been suddenly stood on his head, and shook hands without a word, scarcely knowing what he was doing.

During breakfast Miss Valettas displayed herself at her best. She apologized a little for a most unladylike appetite, concluding with an allusion to many days of hungry want, very simply worded, of the pathos of which she was herself apparently unconscious. Then she chatted brightly of places Sarleigh had visited abroad, which she happened also to have seen. Her conversation glided on with artless ease, and a certain courteous reserve, whilst the play of features capable of the finest shades of meaning, and her dainty way of holding her head in positions of almost inexhaustible variety, lent what she said irresistible grace. The curate rose from the table ignorant of the truth, that she had seen more than twenty times as much as himself, and vastly delighted at his newly-discovered power of sustaining a lively conversation.

After breakfast followed arrangements. Sarleigh proposed that the luggage, concerning which so much had been said the night before, should have their first consideration. Had Miss Valettas left anything at her lodgings in Clayton Street?

"Absolutely nothing."

As her preserver naturally felt a delicacy about pressing her with the interrogations this answer suggested, her strange statement passed unchallenged. Yet a suspicion was unavoidable that, connected with the lodging in the ill-famed street, was some unpleasantness she was eager to conceal. Was she to be entirely re-equipped, and at whose expense? To this question, put as inoffensively as was practicable, she replied,

"Mr. Sarleigh, I think, let me tell you, all arrangements very tiresome. At any rate there is no need to be in a hurry about making them. I had much rather that you and I went somewhere for the day and enjoyed ourselves. We could make these arrangements when we came back. I have not had a day's pleasure since—I don't know when. It is a lovely morning after the rain, and I am positive it is a shame

to waste indoors a single fine day, in a country where they are so few. Can't we go somewhere?"

"Miss Valettas!"

"Well! There is no harm, is there, in enjoying oneself whilst one has the opportunity? It seldom lasts long."

"We have to arrange first how you are going to *live*!"

"Very well, I don't mind you making arrangements, if you like it. I never understand them."

The last words, said rather peevishly, were followed by the speaker's taking a fire-screen from its place on the chimney-piece and toying with it as though she had no further interest in what was taking place.

"Indeed, Miss Valettas, I am sorry to vex you," said the patient deacon, gently, "but I am sure you can have no conception of the difficulty we shall probably find in getting you comfortably settled in any congenial work. Excuse my speaking plainly."

"Certainly," replied she, evidently a little mollified by his forbearance. "If I could earn a little, I could begin getting my things out of

pawn. You know, I had to pawn things, I could not help it."

From the tone in which she concluded, it was plain she found it difficult to excuse to herself the level to which she had sunk.

"Up to what value have you pawned things?"

"I don't know exactly ; but you may see."

She drew from her pocket a large handful of pawnbroker's tickets, and laid them on the table, at the same time saying, bitterly,

"I hate these things. Merely to see them makes me so hideously ashamed." Sarleigh's look of disapproval became, while she spoke, very forbidding, and she concluded, in a more apologetic tone, "I am afraid there are a great many of them."

After a cursory inspection of the tickets, the deacon asked,

"How long have you been in London?"

"Alone? Two months or a little more."

"If I may ask it, when you left Mr. Noall, how much did he give you?"

"All he owed me, a quarter's stipend, and Mrs. Noall made me a little present."

"What was a quarter's stipend?"

"A hundred francs. They gave me five pounds; that is a penny or two more."

"These tickets represent nearly forty pounds."

"I daresay."

"And you, who have been receiving only twenty pounds a year, spent nearly forty pounds in two months?"

She made no reply.

"With twenty pounds a year you were able to buy clothes and jewellery that you could pawn for forty pounds."

Still no answer.

"What did you teach?"

"Ordinary things. We used to travel a great deal, and to have plenty of amusements."

"And you joined in their amusements. It is not usual for governesses to be on such familiar terms with the families by which they are employed: and you must have found it difficult to afford on twenty pounds a year to join in their amusements."

Again she made no reply, and kept her eyes fixed on the fire.

"If you were accustomed to make so little

enough, how did you manage to spend forty pounds in two months?"

"It is not hard to spend money in London."

"No. But how did you spend it? Why will you not answer me?"

"Because you do not believe me."

"Well, but how can I?"

"How can you?" she said, suddenly, looking round with flashing eyes. "You *are* cruel! I could cry, but I won't, for I have done nothing to cry for. Do you think I liked pawning my things? Do you think I enjoyed being robbed of my money? or that I wished to go from one wretched den to another more wretched still? Why do you pretend to be shocked at *me*, and speak as if it was all *my* fault? I tell you I hated it all. And then to be taunted about it, and disbelieved!"

"I do not disbelieve you."

"You did a minute since, if you do not now. It is very magnificent to be so punctilious about speaking the truth, but permit me to tell you that you don't give me much encouragement when I speak the truth."

"I fear I have made you angry," said Sarleigh, soothingly, at the same time think-

ing to himself, "What a temper she has!"

"Not a bit, only, mon ami, I can assure you I could very easily concoct a little history about myself far more attractive than the facts, and much better fitted to command your belief and other people's sympathy. I am beginning now to see that I have been very silly not to have done so. Do you not agree with me?"

No, he did not agree with her. Neither did he know what to make of her way of talking, nor how to answer her.

"How about your dinner, sir?" asked Mrs. Twindle, poking her head into the room.

Sarleigh turned and saw her dilated eyes fixed on the display of pawn tickets. A charming mixture of amused wrath and delighted disgust in the landlady's countenance did not escape his notice. He realized that he and his friend had been caught quarreling about her pawned property, and that Mrs. Twindle had material for further embellishment of the pretty tales she had doubtless already launched into the world, with the assistance of the tradespeople who came to the back door. He hurriedly ordered dinner for himself at six. Mrs. Twindle left, and he again sat down

at the table, determined to master his irritation. It was not without an effort that he said, quietly,

"You see, Miss Valettas, these tickets represent a good deal of money. If I were to give you ten pounds to begin with, could you get some of your things back, those you want or value most?"

"It would be a great boon to me. You are very generous."

"Are ten pounds enough?"

A thought passed through her mind. Some of the things pawned were keepsakes. She would have liked to rescue them first. Ten pounds would not suffice for that. Like most foreigners, she had a vague idea that English people possess indefinite spare wealth; English people are always rich. But her protector, though generous, was cold, and, she thought, hard with her, even in his kindness; and the things he said made her ashamed. She kept her own counsel, therefore, and replied,

"Quite enough, thank you. You are very kind."

"You must choose for yourself what things you will have," he said, pushing the tickets

across the table towards her. "And I think you had better put them into something that will look like luggage, so as to satisfy Mrs. Tidgin."

Then he gave her twelve pounds. "Two for herself," he said.

Her gratitude was expressed more by her looks than her words, but she did thank him shyly, and added,

"I ought to explain how I spent so much. You see, Mr. Noall did not pay me a great deal, but one or other of the family frequently gave me a present. When we were going anywhere, and Mr. Noall gave the girls money to amuse themselves, he often gave me some too. I paid for scarcely anything, and so had all my salary for pocket-money. I had a good many nice things of my own, too, before I went to them. After I left them I was astonished to see how fast my money flew. I was robbed, too. When I found myself without means I pawned first my jewellery, then other things. Of course I know it is not ladylike, but what was I to do? At any rate, nobody seems to think all this was hard on *me*."

The last remark, accentuated by an abrupt

change of tone, was suggested by the incredulous appearance of Sarleigh's face, indicating his suspicion that this explanation had been contrived whilst she sat so silent by the fire. Later, when he knew Bourbachokátzouli Valettas better, he learnt that she had no need of time for the contrivance of explanations.

When she had left him to go in search of her missing property, he wrote two letters; one to his sister Alice, the other to Mr. Noall. The latter was a formal note, containing a few common-place inquiries; the former more interesting, as showing the aspect in which the deacon thought fit to represent to his sister what had happened.

“MY DEAR ALICE,

“I am sure you will feel interested in what I have to tell you to-day.

“Last night, soon after I had finished tea, Mrs. Twindle told me somebody wanted me. When I went to the door, a foreign young lady was there, who afterwards turned out to be a Greek. The night was very stormy, and the poor thing, who had no umbrella, was

literally drenched. In spite of Mrs. Twindle's displeasure (over which you and I have so often laughed together) I asked the stranger into my room, and inquired why she wanted to see me. She told me the most piteous story I ever heard, and, at the end of it, what was more dreadful still, that as she had nothing left, and not a single friend, if somebody did not help her she had made up her mind to drown herself. I did not know what to do, but thought anything better than letting the poor thing destroy herself. So I got her a lodging for a few days, and have promised to help her. I wish you had been with me to see her, you might have assisted her, and been kind to her in many ways I could not. She was once a governess, but has been trying in vain to get work. She seems to have travelled a good deal, and can talk very pleasantly about what she has seen."

Here Sarleigh paused. He had projected a detailed account of all the circumstances sufficiently minute to engage his sister's interest in the stranger. But so many things seemed better left untold, his own opinions on some points were so unsettled, and so much writing was needed to record so little, that he resolved to

let the inadequate narrative go as it was. The missive was, therefore, briefly concluded—

“You are sure to wish to know what sort of person she is. She is tall, dark, very thin (I fear she has not had enough to eat lately), and has a pleasant voice. I wish you could see her.

“Give my love to mother. Your affectionate brother,

“F. SARLEIGH.”

Not without serious misgivings concerning the aspect in which his ecclesiastical superior might view the whole affair, Sarleigh now proceeded to report to his vicar Miss Valettas' appeal for assistance, and the response it had met with from himself. He took with him the still open letter of inquiries to Mr. Noall, as an evidence of his prudence. On his way the physical stimulus of brisk walking in the cheery sunshine quickened his pulse, and made him mightily bold about his enterprise. He indulged himself freely in thoughts such as these :

“Her champion, poor girl, and nothing less, I ought to be, I am determined to be. Who-

ever, whatever she is, shall make no difference. The worse she is, the more noble to have saved her. It is a noble part, to stand up and bravely shield a poor desperate young thing, lost in a foreign city, to stick up for her through thick and thin." (People think worse English even than they speak.) "To silence sneers with a pompous, 'Miss Valettas is my friend, sir. If you speak of her like this I must leave the room!'" Sarleigh walked very fast under the dynamic influence of prospective indignation, and cut an old tinker, who touched his hat to him, and ever after believed him proud and disdainful of poor folks. "By my help," continued the deacon's thoughts, "she shall be put in the way of some honourable means of subsistence, and lead a happy life. I will teach her, too, how to become more thoughtful, more earnest, wiser, less reckless. Has the poor thing any religion? Perhaps very little. I will convert her. Impressed with the vanity of a world in which she has suffered so much, she may become a sister of mercy. She will be no common one: rather a nineteenth century Saint Teresa; the foundress, or, at least, the superior of a great community; some

association that will be a new factor in the religious life of this corrupted age, that will show what women can do for the world, for religion, for theological thought. Then, when she is the eminent superior of the largest religious community in England, the most energetic in the world, renowned alike among the religious and irreligious, a friend of prelates, and a patroness of devout duchesses, I, her champion in the time of distress, shall be her friend, the welcome guest of her leisure moments, the confidant of her inmost thoughts and profoundest schemes."

Sunning himself in this unselfish and entirely unworldly prospect of future glorification, Sarleigh arrived at the Vicarage, and, in timorous anticipation of what might come next, rang the bell with a sensation akin to palpitation of the heart.

Mr. Couton, the incumbent of Saint Adhelm's, was a tall, thin man, with a large grizzly beard, a straight nose, gentle eyes, a much-lined forehead, and the patient look of one who has suffered much and in silence. Among his brother clergymen, almost as good judges of each

other's merits as women, he was called an uncertain man ; perhaps because he spoke slowly, the only way he could articulate distinctly, owing to an impediment in his speech, of which not even his wife was cognizant. To his curate's story he granted a patient hearing. The deacon, anxious to present his protégée in a favourable light, and to veil the serious nature of his own misgivings, extended his prolix and involved narrative by a wearisome running commentary of his own views of Miss Valettas' conduct, feelings, difficulties, and misfortunes. Having heard him to the end without interrupting, the vicar replied, dropping his words, as it were, one by one, so that each short sentence took long to utter,

“Mr. Sarleigh, I do not know that I should have done exactly as you have. I do fear the girl may be an impostor.” (The curate wished to say, “Oh, no, no, no!” but had not the courage. Mr. Couton's manner of speech almost defied interruption by leaving room for it between every two words.) “Yet I feel, considering the crime she said she was contemplating, you did right to disregard consequences. It is difficult at a critical moment to

do what is exactly best. You did well in doing something. In a day or two we shall know better what to think of her, and what to do with her."

He promised to visit Miss Valettas, and to take Mrs. Couton with him. After that, if there seemed reason to suppose she had spoken the truth, she should be helped, and everything done for her that it was in his power to do. It was near luncheon time, and he invited Sarleigh to remain. The latter had the pleasure of again relating the whole history, this time to Mrs. Couton. But as she asked questions, which the vicar had not done, the deacon scarcely acquitted himself so entirely to his own satisfaction in his second sketch of his adventures as in the first. Nevertheless, he left the Vicarage childishly delighted at the approval his behaviour had earned.

His steps were now directed towards Clayton Street. Mrs. Couton insisted that inquiries must be made there, though she acknowledged it might be unkind to inform Miss Valettas of the procedure. Miss Valettas' "champion" immediately undertook the investigation, prin-

cipally because he feared its result. Clayton Street was a narrow, dirty alley, running out of a shabby square, and terminated by the blank brick wall of a factory yard. Costermongers, wood-choppers, and people of no definite employment, composed the bulk of its inhabitants. The houses, of which the ground-rents were on the point of expiration, were crumbling to ruin. Let in tenements, at beggarly rents, by landlords eager to wring the last few shillings of profit out of a meagre investment, they had become leprous, battered dens, unfit for any gentle girl to breathe in. As Sarleigh surveyed them, he almost hoped Miss Valettas had not spoken the truth when she said she had lodged in one of them. If she had, how did she discover the place? Who could have told her of it, or persuaded, or even permitted her to live there?

The Hudsons' house was one of those that were less dilapidated. On the other hand, ugly reports were afloat concerning the character of the people who inhabited it. When questioned by Sarleigh, Mrs. Hudson indignantly denied the existence of any such lodger as Miss Valettas.

"Never was, and hasn't been, no such person in my back room as no foreign young person. As I don't let to foreigners, which has places of their own where they goes to, as everybody knows as knows anything at all. I ain't let my back room these twelve months, since the boy died there with the typhus. Not but what I'd let it if I could, and the rent at eight shillings is more than I can stand to pay, and John out of work, and my husband with the rheumatics, as never has no help which is gived to others as don't want it, which I could name, and don't. No young person ain't been in my back room, as, if she says she has, is a wicked lie, as them knows what said it."

The deacon hoped with all his heart it was a lie. He called at the next house. There the people were much dirtier, but less suspected by the police, and better disposed towards the church. They said a young woman had been lodging at the Hudsons' for about ten days. She was not a foreigner. Some of the neighbours said she had seen better days. She was nice about her dress, and not friendly when spoken to. She did not seem to have any

acquaintances. It was reported she had run away from somewhere.

The deacon's lips contracted, and the woman noticed it. The lower orders, like the beasts, though almost insensible to inanimate objects, instantaneously note the slightest motion of living things. When he was gone she formed her own conclusion about his inquiries and his looks too, and set a report afloat "that he was messed up with her."

There lived at a corner house in this disreputable street an old woman, an indescribably dirty little wrinkled body, celebrated for never cooking, washing, nor working, and for spending the greater part of her life at the window watching her neighbours. General opinion pronounced her an infallible oracle concerning all that took place in the street. Three shillings a week were allowed her by the parish, of which two were expended on the rent of her room. This apartment she resolutely refused, so poor though she was, to exchange for a cheaper one with a less extensive view. Sarleigh was a favourite of the old dame, who had been won by his admiring a begrimed engraving, given her when a girl, which hung over her fireless

grate. An application to her elicited the following information.

"Miss Winnit, or some such name," was a young person that had been lodging at Hudsons'. She was a "foreignneering young person," very poor, and almost starving. She was always nicely dressed, however, and looked like a lady. Doubtless she had seen better days. When spoken to she gave herself airs. Nobody in the street or neighbourhood knew her. It was said she came from the north of London. She "wasn't no better nor she should be," and, after remaining at the Hudsons' ten days, had gone off yesterday morning with one of the young men lodgers.

"I heard she was not a foreigner, and that she had run away from somewhere."

"Then you heard a lie, sir. That's not her, that's another," replied the old woman, who never allowed any information but her own to be of the least value. She added a detailed history of "the other young woman," and demonstrated that she was not "Miss Winnit."

The curate went home in an uncomfortable humour. Though he already knew the common

people too well to attach much weight to what they said, and was jealous of Miss Valettas' reputation, he yet felt unable to divest himself of a suspicion of something amiss.

CHAPTER V.

WHILST her "champion" was thus engaged in hearing what the low-bred credulity of inferiors, into whose midst misfortune had plunged her, could say in her dispraise, Bourbachokátzouli had returned, having redeemed most of the pledges she immediately needed, and some others on which she set an especial value.

Amongst the latter was a photograph album which she left at Sarleigh's rooms, with a few other things, because she had brought them loose in the cab. The rest, packed in a portmanteau, and making a very respectable appearance of luggage, she took to her own lodgings. She had not long returned when Mr. and Mrs. Couton called. The latter was a little body, almost shabbily dressed, with a sharp

chin and thin nose. She had one of those artless countenances that suggest a doubt between honest simplicity and crass stupidity. However, the little woman possessed a gift rare amongst women, the power of seeing another woman's good qualities. As every one of the sex can see another woman's faults Mrs. Couton was a pretty shrewd judge of character. Mr. Couton spoke to Bourbachokátzouli kindly and considerately, without pressing her with inquisitorial questions, and leaving her to say pretty much what she pleased about herself. His wife sat and listened. No one suspects the sagacity of silent visitors, though they do sit still and look on. The visit was a short one. At its end Miss Valettas felt not merely relieved that a critical ten minutes was over, but sorry, too, that she had not the night before gone to Mr. Couton instead of his curate. Mrs. Couton invited her to spend the following day at the vicarage, "it will save you the expense of meals," she said, "and you and I shall come to know each other better." As they walked away from the house Miss Valettas watched them from her window, distinctly sensible that there were, after all, good folks in London.

"Well, my dear?" asked Mr. Couton of his little silent wife.

"She is all right, John. Not quite truthful always, I should say, though she spoke the truth this afternoon, poor girl!"

Which was all that passed between them concerning Miss Valettas.

About the same time a gentleman called at Mrs. Twindle's, and inquired if Mr. Sarleigh was at home. He was a tall, well-formed man, fair, with close cut hair and a small moustache. The lines of his face, terminated by a powerful chin, were singularly fine and regular, his lips of almost feminine beauty. There was a directness in his glance bordering on brusqueness. His voice, though not musical, had a pleasant and at times incisive ring.

Hearing Sarleigh was not within, he said he would await his return, and was shown into the deacon's room. For a little while he stood at the window, watching the blacksmith and his son moving about some broken wheels in order to extract an old tire. The picturesque group of the stalwart man, with his bare, dirty, hairy arms and leathern apron, standing in the afternoon sunshine beside the bright-faced,

golden-haired lad, whose little body was all strained to its utmost to bear the weight of two heavy wheels, whilst his father tugged at the old iron lying underneath, struck the eye of the visitor, and amused him, till the old tire was finally extracted, and the man returned to his work in the forge, and the boy to his play.

Then he turned to look for some other thing wherewith to while away the time. His glance fell on the photograph album. He sat down, and began turning over its leaves. A few pictures of French provincial scenery occupied his attention for a short time, then he passed quickly two or three pages of cabinet portraits, until one forced from him an expression of astonished admiration.

“What a face!”

It was Bourbachokátzouli Valettas herself in the height of girlish beauty before her worst troubles commenced; a likeness by one of the most skilled Parisian photographers, who had known how to make the best of a very lovely subject. The stranger looked at it long, wondering whether it was really the reflection of a living face, and, if so, who was the possessor

of such lips, such eyes, such brows! It was not the physical beauty that so powerfully impressed him, he was too familiar with fair and studied faces for that, but the suggestion of character that lurked beneath. He placed the book in a good light, and stepped back from it to get a better view. As he did so his eye fell on a name written in pencil at the bottom of the page, evidently deliberately erased and now illegible. He essayed several times, but in vain, to read it.

Then he stood, leaning against the corner of a bookshelf, and feasted his eyes on the picture, on the power and passion of her nostrils, the combined sweetness and decision of her lips, the shadows round her eyes, the delicate contour of soft cheeks, the breadth of forehead above, on the reserve, the courage, the capriciousness of the enigmatic face full of that incisive charm of strangeness that awakens thought upon thought.

"A woman to worship!" he said. "I wonder who she is!"

He drew from his pocket a pocket sketch-book, and was going to make a sketch of the face, when it occurred to him that the

album might contain another photograph of the same lady. He replaced it, therefore, on the table, and began searching. His quest was successful.

This second picture was a photograph of Miss Valettas leaning on the railing of a balcony. Though the easy pose had been carefully chosen to bring out the salient beauties of a figure of classic perfection, the second photograph was far inferior in force to the former. In the corner, however, the name "Bourbachokátzouli Valettas" was still legible, though an attempt had been made to rub it out. After a little while, the man turned back to the face, put it up in the light again, and went back to his former point of view.

"I wonder who she is?" he thought. "Bourbachokátzouli Valettas is a strange name. What, I wonder, has become of her?"

So intense was his interest in the portrait that he did not notice a light knock at the door, nor the entrance of somebody into the room.

"I beg your pardon."

He turned quickly to see who spoke. Miss Valettas was standing near the door, and

bowing to him. "Herself!" he exclaimed, too astonished to return her courteous salutation. He looked straight in her face, almost rudely, as if spellbound, Before that penetrating gaze her eyelids sank; then, realizing he was behaving impolitely, the stranger stammered,

"I beg your pardon, madam. I hope I am not intruding. I came to see Mr. Sarleigh."

"He is out."

"They told me so. I came in to wait till he returned."

"He will come in soon, I daresay. Won't you take a seat?"

"Thank you. Permit me to introduce myself. My name is Montenotte. I was at school with Mr. Sarleigh, and we have kept up a schoolboy friendship. I have the honour, I think, of addressing Miss Valettas?"

It was Bourbachokátzouli's turn to be taken by surprise.

"Excuse me, Mr. Montenotte, how came you to know my name?"

He pointed to the album.

"Ah, you have been amusing yourself with my album."

"I have been looking at your portrait."

Bourbachokátzouli thought, "You might have added, 'and comparing it with the original.'"

She said, turning her face away,

"It is not much like me now."

"It is like you, too, only, may I hazard a guess?"

"Pray don't ask leave. Nobody cares what they say to me."

"I always care what I say to a lady."

"Thank you. You don't know, then, that lately I have had to tell people I am a lady, and have not always been believed."

She spoke earnestly, many shades of expression passing over her face whilst she uttered the few words. Montenotte shrugged his shoulders, and replied,

"Most people are fools. Excuse a threadbare truism."

"What are you going to ask leave to say?"

"You have been very ill, perhaps."

"I have not been ill," she replied, coldly.

"I was mistaken, then."

An awkward silence ensued. Miss Valettas looked intently at the trimming round her dress, and patted her lips with the feather of a pen she had taken from the table. Monte-

notte watched her with the scrutinizing gaze of a man who is trying to decipher something. She was not unconscious of that intense gaze, and was uncomfortable under it only because not free to discover whether it meant admiration, or curiosity, or even amused contempt. She would have stolen a side-glance at him to see what his face betokened if she dared, but she knew the act would be noticed, and betray to him what she herself was thinking of. The situation was becoming ridiculous, and Montenotte, perceiving it rested with him to say something, asked,

“May I make a sketch of this picture?”

This was the opportunity his cautious companion desired. Without raising her head, she looked askance at him from under her eyebrows. His face was meaningless. Either its expression had altered, or he had the power to make it illegible. So she fenced.

“Do gentlemen in this country usually ask for copies of a lady’s portrait the first time they meet her?”

“Ah—I believe so.”

“Indeed! Then, since you are kind enough to jest with me, you will permit me to conclude

you were not in earnest in desiring to copy my picture."

She leaned back in her chair and looked him full in the face, with an expression the exact counterpart of his own illegible countenance. Then she abruptly rose from her chair, and, actuated by one of those sudden impulses to which natures like hers are prone, hurriedly drew the photograph from the book, and was on the point of tearing it when Montenotte interposed, starting to his feet, and holding out his hands as if he would seize her wrists.

"Miss Valettas, do not do that! You cannot know what a lovely face it is. Do not tear it, please."

She threw the picture on the table.

"You may take it, if you like; I do not want it," she said, resuming her seat.

"I may take your photograph?"

"If you like."

"Have you another copy?"

"No."

"Then I will not take it; it is not fair to rob you of it, especially as I can copy it, if you would permit me."

"When you have copied it, you will say, this is a picture of——"

"Of Miss Valettas, whom I met one evening at my friend Sarleigh's lodgings."

"Then you shan't copy it."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't choose you should."

"The best of reasons. Only what is the reason of the reason?"

She was silent for a minute, then she said,

"The reason is, you would not care to have the picture if you knew my history."

"I think I do know your history."

"Indeed!" She looked at him smiling incredulously. "I wish you would tell it me; I think it would be amusing."

"It is not altogether amusing."

Her face clouded instantly.

"Who told you that?" she asked.

"This and that."

A slight movement of his open hand implied a comparison of the picture with herself.

"Tell me," she said, softly.

"You are a native of the South of Europe—a Greek, I think. You have been educated in

France—Paris, say. There you were very happy. Afterwards troubles came, which brought you at last to this country. Shall I go on?"

She nodded assent. He continued more slowly, softly, almost compassionately,

"Here you have suffered. You have not been ill, but trouble, want, humiliations, great humiliations, have reduced you to despair. Naturally you are brave, happy, careless, and secretly reserved. Here they have goaded your courage to desperation; suspicion has poisoned your natural light-heartedness; things have been wrung from your lips that you would rather die than have confessed. And so you—not very long ago—thought strange thoughts of death, not like a woman of your age might think—black thoughts—and that not of natural death, but cold, desperate, wilful——"

"Hush!" she moaned. Her head, whilst he spoke, had sunk low on her bosom, and she had turned slowly away from him and leant over the arm of the chair. Several times she had been fain to stop him, but courage to speak aloud failed her till an instinctive dread of the grim charge of suicide forced her to exclaim. Men are sufficiently annoyed by a successful

mental dissection of themselves, to women of refined reserve it is torture. Unintentionally Montenotte had begun by being ruthless. Yet the conjectures to which he had given utterance were little more than those any observant person might have been led, by the change in Bourbachokátzouli's face, to form, slightly amplified by a few happy guesses, and an assurance occasioned by the effect his words had upon her. She, after her one word, remained perfectly motionless. For a brief time he sat looking at her.

Then he rose, purposely making a noise in pushing his chair back, that, conscious of being no longer watched, she might recover herself more easily. When she ventured to glance round, he was studying the backs of Sarleigh's books.

"I have been thoughtless and hurt you. I beg your pardon," he said, as presently his eyes accidentally met her anxious gaze.

"I have nothing to pardon. I asked you to tell me. But I could not expect you would guess so near the truth. I would ask a favour of you. You will not——"

"I will not subject a lady to the indignity of

having to ask a favour of a stranger. Your secrets are safe."

"Then we are not *strangers*."

She held out her hand to him graciously. He took it and asked,

"Friends?"

"Oh, no! Only not *strangers*."

"You will let me copy your portrait now?"

"No; you know too much. You will say to yourself, when you see it, 'This is the woman who did so and so.'"

"I don't deny it. But I will prove to you in two minutes that you may as well let me copy it."

"Prove it, then."

"See," he said, taking his pocket sketch-book, "how imprudent you are, Miss Valettas, again to challenge me. I fear you do not learn from experience." As he spoke, a few touches of his pencil produced a rough sketch of the photograph which was behind his back, sufficiently like it to surprise Bourbachokátzouli. "You see," he concluded, "you may as well let me copy your portrait."

"It seems I cannot help it. You may make the copy."

A piece of paper being selected from off Sarleigh's writing-table, Montenotte began making a sketch of the photograph. He sketched slowly, but each line came clear and unerring from the point of the pencil, guided by a master hand. Miss Valettas looked on, rather indifferently at first, till his hands, which were remarkably handsome, and the care he was evidently expending on the copy, engaging her notice, she drew nearer to see how the sketch progressed. The soft beauty of a few lines that commanded her admiration flattered her vanity too. Coming close to his chair, she laid one hand on the back of it, the bent fingers of the other touched the table at his side. Her face brightened as she watched, with eager interest, the quiet growth of the sketch.

"You *can* draw," she said.

"I am an artist."

"How I should like to see your pictures!"

"Come and see them, then. You will be disappointed, but I shall be delighted to see you."

"Why shall I be disappointed?"

"I do not paint well—and very seldom now."

"Why is that?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and said again, "Come and see." The little sketch was completed. "It is not a bit like you," he said. "I am getting quite out of practice."

"It is more flattering than the photograph."

"If you like it write your name under it."

She took the pencil from his hands, and signed her name beneath the sketch. As he was carefully folding it up in another piece of paper, she said, rather shyly,

"Mr. Montenotte, one part of my history, which you did not guess, I should be very ungrateful to conceal. When things were at the worst, it was your friend, Mr. Sarleigh, who saved me."

"I envy him."

"You envy him! I don't think he would much have minded anyone else having been my protector instead."

"Then perhaps I might hope——"

"That I, another time, would rather call upon you than drown myself. Well, perhaps I would." And she began to laugh.

"At any rate, you might call first on me, and drown yourself afterwards," he replied, joining in the jest.

"Rather than call again! Very likely."

"But you *will* come and see the pictures. When shall that be?"

"Ask Mr. Sarleigh to bring me with him."

"If he says no?"

"He will at first, and I'll make him change it into 'Yes.' He is very tractable, poor man. Listen. There is somebody coming in. I do believe it is he. Sit down."

Saying which, she sat down herself, and recommenced, in a very different tone,

"And so you have often been in Paris."

"Oh! yes," replied the artist, amused, and a trifle surprised.

"Were you ever in a queer little—— Oh! here is Mr. Sarleigh at last." The door opened and Sarleigh entered. "Mr. Sarleigh, Mr. Montenotte has been here waiting for you ever so long, and I have had to amuse him, or bore him, I don't know which."

Though he did his best to conceal it, Sarleigh was both surprised and annoyed. Why was Miss Valettas in his rooms instead of her own? How long had she and the artist been enjoying this *tête-à-tête*? Determined to explain to her the unseemliness of her conduct as soon as they

were alone, he suppressed his immediate vexation, and, with a pleasant smile of recognition, held out his hand to Montenotte.

"I am glad to see you, and sorry I should have kept you waiting so long," he said. "I am sure Miss Valettas has helped you to spend the time pleasantly."

The end of his own speech a good deal surprised the curate, who was ignorant of the very slight difference between acting a part and feeling it. To his observation Montenotte assented, and then began to explain the purport of his visit, the sale of a library Sarleigh had, a few days previously, expressed a wish to buy. The owner had been persuaded now to part with the books at a much lower price than that first named, and his friend urged the curate to conclude the transaction before the proprietor again changed his mind. Sarleigh demurred. He had not the money, he said. In truth, he had had the money that morning, but a part of it had been already expended on Miss Valettas, and he imagined, with reason, that much more of it, if not all, must go in the same direction, if he was fully to keep his promises to her. He meant to keep those promises.

Loth, therefore, as he was to lose the library, his ambition to do the destitute girl good persuaded him to refuse it. A faint suspicion of the truth presented itself to Miss Valettas, who remained all through an auditor of the discussion between Sarleigh and his friend, and noticed the shuffling nature of the reasons the former alleged for his apparently unwise determination.

But she set her conjecture aside as extremely improbable, and so relieved her mind of an irritating feeling that a sacrifice was being made in her behalf which she had no right to permit, and about which, however much she might desire it, she could not make a remark without impertinence.

The books refused, deliberately and finally, Montenotte next proposed an early visit to his father's house at Chiswick.

"Come to Chiswick on Thursday. We have had the pictures my father brought from Spain framed, and at last they are hung. I wish you would come and see them."

Sarleigh accepted with pleasure.

"And perhaps," continued Montenotte, "Miss Valettas will come with you?"

"Ah, I should like that so much, Mr. Montenotte!" exclaimed she.

"Do you not know, Montenotte,—" said Sarleigh, "oh! by-the-by, I wish you would come upstairs and see that photograph I bought the other day."

"Could you not bring it down here, and let me see it too?" asked Bourbachokátzouli, mischievously. The curate's reason for wishing Montenotte to come upstairs with him was so very transparent.

"No, no. You come with me, Montenotte," he said, going towards the door.

"Am I to say good-bye now, Mr. Montenotte?" asked Miss Valettas, "or shall I see you again before you go?"

"I shall come and say good-bye to you. I want to see how you will manage it," he added, in a whisper, as he turned to follow Sarleigh into the hall.

Of course, when they got upstairs, Sarleigh explained it was not to see the photograph that he had brought him there, but to speak of Miss Valettas, about whom, he explained, he knew really very little.

"I know you helped her in her difficulties."

"Yes. I suppose she has told you. She was going to drown herself." (Montenotte thought he might have kept the girl's determination secret, as he evidently supposed she had not herself cared to confess it.) "Of course, you know, I felt it to be my duty to prevent that; but, after all, you know, I know nothing about her, and, indeed, I feel rather suspicious. She ought not to be here, but in her own apartments. And then, you know, I dare say it is all right, only, don't you know, if it is, I don't want a lot of people to be talking nonsense. I don't want to be making a fool of myself, being romantic, and all that kind of thing, you know. And so, don't you see, I don't think it will quite do for me to be travelling about London with her."

"She seems a nice girl."

"I think she is. Poor thing! one must pity her, at any rate. But we clergy are obliged to be so particular, you know."

"Yes, I know you are mighty particular for the first year or two; after that, you relax. Still I think Miss Valettas a nice girl, and, if she wishes to see my pictures, I shall have much pleasure in showing them to her."

"By all means, only don't ask me to bring her."

"Nonsense, man! Bring her with you and come to luncheon."

"I'll not bring her, Montenotte, and that's final."

"Very well. I suppose, then, we may go downstairs again."

Which they did, the artist thinking to himself, "Now there will be something to see." When they returned to the little sitting-room, Miss Valettas was standing by the window threading a needle, for it was beginning to grow dark.

"Well, Mr. Sarleigh," she said, without looking round, and seemingly immensely intent on the needle, "have you told Mr. Montenotte what a bad girl I am, and how I make you suspicious even against your will, and that so you cannot possibly consent to my accompanying you to Chiswick?"

Montenotte, who, though prepared to be amused, scarcely expected so direct an assault on his friend as this, turned aside to conceal his laughter.

"Oh," said Sarleigh, "we have been talking about——"

"No fibs, mon ami, please."

Montenotte pricked up his ears. "Mon ami!" he thought—"and does he permit this young lady, about whose character he feels rather suspicious, to call him mon ami?"

"Oh, you know, Miss Valettas," said the puzzled deacon, "as I told Montenotte, we clergy are compelled to be very particular. And I think that perhaps it would be better for you and me, for both of us, that we should not go together."

"And I think, Mr. Sarleigh, that I am going to go, and that you are going to take me."

There was a delicious effrontery in the way she turned on him and said this, almost as a girl might speak to a man in love with her. At the end of it, she glanced at Montenotte and laughed. This last manoeuvre was a little more than Sarleigh meant to tolerate. He said,

"I do not think, Miss Valettas, that, after your speaking to me so, I need hesitate to say that I cannot take you with me."

"Tell me, then, if you dare, what reasons you gave Mr. Montenotte, when he was up-

stairs with you, for not wishing for my company. Tell me."

"I am not bound to tell you, but I will. I do not think it wise."

"Why not wise?"

"People will talk—the people around here who know me."

"And what would they say?"

"That we ought to know better. *I*, at any rate, suppose Miss Valettas knows how a lady ought to behave. In London, at least, ladies do not go visiting with any gentleman they may happen to know. Another lady might take you, I cannot. Mrs. Couton will possibly, if you ask her."

"He is getting the best of this," thought Montenotte.

"Mr. Sarleigh," said Bourbachokátzouli, coldly, "you are labouring to deceive me, but quite in vain. You suspect me. You have told Mr. Montenotte you suspect me, I am sure. The truth is, you are ashamed to be seen with me. If it were anyone else, you would say, 'I shall go with her as any gentleman might with a lady.' But with *me* the case is quite different. To escape going with me you parade before me

the usages of a class to which neither you nor I nor Mr. Montenotte belong. We are not rich nor titled people, and Bermondsey is not May-fair. Thank you, I understand you."

She sat down, and, turning her face away, hastily covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and began to sob.

"What on earth am I to do?" said Sarleigh, appealing to Montenotte.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the artist.

As he spoke, Miss Valettas rose, wiping her eyes, and looking the picture of woe. Holding out her hand to Montenotte, she said, with a broken voice and trembling lips, whilst her hanging head left her face half concealed,

"Good-bye, Mr. Montenotte, and thank you for not being altogether ashamed to know poor me." Then, turning to Sarleigh, she continued, "You, sir, who promised me so much, shall not be any longer compromised by my suspicious presence."

She stepped towards the door.

"Stop, stop, Miss Valettas," exclaimed the deacon, catching her arm; "I don't suspect you. I only hesitated out of respect to con-

ventionalities. After all, going or not going is a little matter."

"Little things show us what people think of us. If you do trust me, take me with you to Chiswick."

"If you attach so much importance to it, I will."

"Then," said Montenotte, "I shall expect the pleasure of seeing you, Miss Valettas, and Mr. Sarleigh, on Thursday next. Will you come to luncheon?"

Sarleigh said all his morning was engaged, and so it was arranged that they should come in the afternoon. Montenotte bade Miss Valettas good-bye, and left the room with Sarleigh. A minute afterwards he returned. He had forgotten his cane.

"On purpose?" asked Miss Valettas.

"No, I really forgot it."

"I gave you credit, then, for more diplomacy than you possess. Here it is. You see I made your friend promise to bring me."

"Yes. You amused me immensely. But—did you really cry?"

Bourbachokátzouli's lips parted in a smile that showed the tips of exquisite teeth, she

archly lifted her wide-opened eyes to his, and so, looking at him, said "Adieu" in a tone that meant "and would you not like to know?"

CHAPTER VI.

UNQUESTIONABLY the remonstrance which Sarleigh, with great want of tact it is true, addressed to Miss Valettas on returning to his sitting-room was not altogether unmerited.

"I do not wish to seem unkind," he said, "you must know as well as I that well-bred people are particular about appearances; and that one is obliged to pay some attention to what they choose to think and say. It is not my place to tell you whether it is becoming for you to wish to go with me to visit my bachelor friends, nor to criticise your conduct, indeed, in any way. Still you must not be offended, if I remind you that your chances for the future depend very much upon your own behaviour."

"He's going to revoke his promise," thought

she, affronted, as any girl would be, by the tone and wording of his speech, and in consequence completely heedless of the reasonableness of what had been said, "we shall see now who is to be master."

"Why," she asked, "should you say that to me? You wish to escape from keeping your promise to take me to see Mr. Montenotte's pictures."

"I have made you a promise, and I am, if you desire it, prepared to keep my promise," replied Sarleigh, nettled.

"I do wish it, so let us say no more about it."

The accomplishment of her wish to visit the artist thus secured, Miss Valettas' mood quickly changed from intractable to gay; and Sarleigh was prettily begged to vouchsafe his attention to a multitude of trifles, with a desire of discussing which with him, she had come across and found Montenotte in his rooms and himself out. First, should she return him the change out of the two pounds she had had for herself. Of course, he said no. Other little matters followed. Bourbachokátzouli showed considerable skill in ordering the sequence of

these trifles, and, the deacon having been artfully coaxed into a happy condition of elated benevolence, she proceeded to regret that, owing either to her neglect or Mrs. Twindle's stupidity, no arrangements for dinner had been made on the other side of the street. When she left in the morning she entirely forgot dinner; indeed, she was not positively certain that Sarleigh meant her to order it when and how she pleased, whether he wished her to make her own arrangement or not. She had intended to ask him at breakfast, but it slipped from her memory. On returning from town she found Mrs. Tidgin had not so much as laid the fires. That she had spent no thought on Miss Valettas' dinner was, therefore, a matter of course. Unfortunately that was not all. Mrs. Tidgin had insuperable objections to dinners later than half-past one, and had blankly refused to cook anything till her own supper-time.

Mr. Couton's call had interrupted the debate between landlady and lodger upon these topics, and also delayed Miss Valettas's appeal to Sarleigh, but as soon as the Vicar and his wife were gone she had come to his rooms to ask his

advice. Now what was to be done? Sarleigh knew that Widow Tidgin, though far from always doing as she was instructed, was punctilious about never doing anything she was not ordered to do, and easily realized the state of affairs. The solution of the difficulty was happily simple. Miss Valettas should remain where she was, and dine with him, there was enough for both. Her thoughtlessness, which resulted in her being more in his rooms than was either necessary or to his liking, was nevertheless irritating to her host, and she doubtless would have been honoured with some very pointed comments on the subject, had not the flattering gratitude with which she accepted his invitation made him ashamed to speak severely. He said, however, she had better go herself, or send a message by Lucy to say her fire was to be kept in (which it would not be by Mrs. Tidgin without direct orders to that effect), because, after dinner, a sermon was to be composed, and he must have his room to himself. Miss Valettas instantly promised compliance, only, instead of complying, remained talking to him till the dinner was on the table.

The deacon fancied he began to understand

his friend. She was certainly capricious, indifferent to appearances, and, at times, intractable. He feared she was also untruthful, and slightly unscrupulous. One thing only had he yet heard her sincerely deplore, inconvenience; and the only thing he had understood she had a *penchant* for was enjoying herself. There was no mistaking the fact that she had tacitly assumed with him a tone of gentle superiority, at times of almost condescending familiarity; nor was he blind to the significant truth that, when she and he had differed, the result had generally been his consenting to her having her own way. Considering that not quite twenty-four hours had elapsed since she came to him in abject despair, Bourbachokátzouli might be said to have gained this ascendancy with remarkable rapidity. She was, too, as far as he could judge, aware that she had gained it. Altogether undetermined as his mind still was about the young lady's true character, these phenomena tended to excite in him considerable dissatisfaction. On the other hand, Miss Valettas was the most charming, the most courteously agreeable, and, at the same time, the most touchingly sensitive woman he had ever met; and, if her

capriciousness and unstraightforwardness made it impossible quite to respect her, her refinement and gentleness rendered it impossible to rebuff or distrust her. But then, though he himself did not at all appreciate the importance of the fact, the deacon was a very young man.

Bourbachokátzouli, during dinner, recounted her morning's adventures. She had redeemed her things, amongst them some keepsakes, to part with which had well-nigh broken her heart. Her father used to bid her rather rob a baker's basket than sell a keepsake. Had she been a man, she thought she should have followed his advice, which certainly was truly hellenic. But being only a girl, she had not the courage to steal, and so pledged and cried.

The amount the cabman demanded amazed her, so also did the sum she was asked to pay for her luncheon at a pastrycook's. It was shameful to ask so much for so little, for she had had scarcely anything. She had been guilty of a piece of extravagance. She knew she deserved to be scolded for it, but the temptation was too strong for her powers of resistance. Here a dainty little pair of gloves was produced.

"They were horribly dear, it is true, but they are lovely gloves, are they not? I was quite ashamed of those I had on this morning."

Evidently Miss Valettas found no difficulty in spending money. Naturally she asked to be told about Montenotte.

"Montenotte is an artist," answered Sarleigh. "He and I were school-fellows. He is a very good fellow in his way."

"He spoke most kindly to me. Of course he saw I had lately been in trouble. I should like to know more about him."

The deacon was not loth to talk of his friend. It enabled him to show Miss Valettas that no reason existed for her to cultivate his acquaintance. Avoiding downright disparagement of Montenotte, for whom he felt a really friendly liking, he posed the artist before Bourbachokátzouli as a bizarre, idle, clever dawdle, engaged in frittering away the best years of his life. So doing, he produced a very life-like caricature of his friend, and, which he least intended, one that instantaneously heightened his hearer's interest. Of her thoughts, in truth, Sarleigh was far from having the intimate

knowledge indispensable for successful detraction.

Montenotte had been Sarleigh's senior at school. When he first knew him, one of the most diligent, previously, and again afterwards one of the idlest of boys. He was a pensive, argumentative lad, ever in search of explanations, reasons, causes, and consequences of the gravest or most trivial things. If he could be persuaded into an idea of benefit to be ultimately derived, he would put his hand to work or play with an energy unrivalled among his schoolmates. But, being a good-natured fellow, everybody's favourite, and always eager to hear the other side of any question, only a short time generally elapsed before he had become convinced that the foreseen advantages were illusive, and then serious projects or still more serious schoolboy sport were not renounced but relinquished with positive indifference. The long spell of creditable study, to which he had so strangely addicted himself, was due to the personal influence of one of the junior masters, between whom and the lad an intimate friendship had sprung up. The master, an idle, egotistic boaster, fell into bad

habits, and was dismissed, and Montenotte's work dropped at once to the level suggested by his schoolfellow's advice to let books "go hang."

On leaving school, he threw himself with energy into art. He was laughed at by his brother artists for being a tame man, and perhaps also because they were jealous of his money. His father had been successful, and his mother had had a handsome fortune. He painted a few pictures, admired more for the promise they contained than for their own merits. A new charlatan at this epoch won the ear of the quondam school philosopher, and initiated him into those regions of eternal fog, the burning social questions of the day. Montenotte laid down his brush. Sarleigh regarded this crisis as his friend's great lost opportunity. "If he had then become really serious he might have done good in his generation," quoth the deacon, "but having been always an easy trifier, more fond of noticing and asking reasons than of trying to mend what was wrong, and to do what was right, he continues to laugh and amuse himself exactly the same or a little more thoughtlessly than before, and does simply nothing at all."

"I like him," replied Bourbachokátzouli; "he has sense. Comprehensive views show penetration, but Revolutions are only vulgar want of judgment. If my poor father had been content to criticize and ridicule the Hagarene curs, instead of wishing to blow out their infidel brains, he might have been alive still, and spoiling them like any other honest Greek, and I should have been a dashing Greek heiress, with many more drachmai for my portion than most of my countrywomen."

From Montenotte the conversation passed to the subject of the Coutons and their call, whence Sarleigh ultimately brought it round to Miss Valettas' own past history. He was anxious to gratify his curiosity about the young lady's antecedents. She was as ready to talk of this as of anything else, chatting apparently without reserve, and occasionally very amusingly. Her last employers, the Noalls, were rich, strange people, very kind to her, but abnormally eccentric. "They were English, certainly, which may account for a good deal, begging your pardon, Mr. Sarleigh." The girls, pretty, clever girls, had been more her friends than her

pupils. She had cried like a child when she left them, not at the time of parting, but when she found herself in her own lodgings, alone in the great strange city.

Whilst she spoke of this, Mrs. Twindle appeared at the door to say a foreign gentleman wanted to see the curate. Sarleigh rose at once, as he did so, turning to Miss Valettas to ask her to excuse him. His guest's face had suddenly become as pale as death. Her eyebrows were lifted up in alarm, and she trembled from head to foot, whilst biting her lips in a desperate effort to conceal her fear.

"Oh, Mr. Sarleigh," she said, "for heaven's sake do not bring him in here."

She rose and began going towards the fireplace, as if she would be as far as possible from the door. As she slowly passed them, she laid her hands nervously first on one and then another piece of furniture, and pushed her fingers into her hair. On reaching the fireplace, she put her elbows on the chimney-piece and hid her face in her hands.

"Do you know who it is?" asked the astonished deacon.

"No, no," she said, quickly turning her face

to him for an instant. "What do you mean? Send him away."

Sarleigh left the room. A German Jew, who wished to give Hebrew lessons, had come, recommended by one of Sarleigh's clerical friends. The Israelite enlarged upon the merits of his method of instruction, his experience, and the moderation of his terms. He was especially desirous that the "Herr Doctor," as he persisted in calling Sarleigh, should peruse a bundle of greasy testimonials.

Still ashy pale, Miss Valettas crept like a cat to the door as soon as Sarleigh closed it behind him, and attempted to hear what was going forward in the hall. The Jew's voice was not soft, but the door was thick. Though it was not till the would-be tutor raised his voice in the heat of argument that she caught any words, the mere tone re-assured her. This could not be the man whose appearance she feared.

"I undertaksh zhat der Herr Doctor learn in von veek to reat verra goot. Zhe shecont veek die formenlehre, zhat vat him call——"

Bourbachokátzouli left the door, tossing her head, and raising her upturned palms.

"Tut, tut! I have been a fool. But what a fright! I wonder what I am to say to Mr. Sarleigh? Let me see. Ah—nerves!"

Sarleigh believed in the nerves. Poor thing! she had been so overstrung lately, it was natural that nothings should upset her. Dinner, which the importunities of the Israelite had interrupted for a quarter of an hour, was concluded, with an addition of some biscuits and a glass of wine, luxuries the deacon did not permit himself when alone. Then he dropped a hint about his sermon.

"I may sit here by the fire whilst you write, may I not? I'll be quiet," said Bourbachokát-zouli.

Sarleigh hesitated. He had discouraging recollections of his sister's conceptions of being quiet whilst he was writing, an intermittent fire of disjointed observations and questions, all requiring answers, and prefaced by, "Oh, Fred, one moment!" or concluded with, "I beg your pardon, I forgot you were writing." These experiences remembered, had he not feared seeming rude, he would have refused Miss Valettas' request; but rather than be discourteous, he said, a prospect of writing till twelve or

one to make up for lost time looming before him,

“Pray stay. It will be cold in your room. Mrs. Tidgin is sure to have let the fire out.”

After this, his sermon paper, pens, Bible, and some other books, were collected from different parts of the room, and the deacon sat down at his writing-table, and humbly yielded himself a victim to the agonies of composition.

Bourbachokátzouli took some needlework from a little work-basket, which she set on the floor at her side, and, the arm-chair being turned half round, that she might not seem to watch the curate at his work, sat stitching, without once even looking at her companion, and as quiet as any mouse. Sarleigh was able, as if he had been alone, to gaze at the ceiling, swing himself on two legs of his chair, make wry faces, scratch his chin, devour his pen, and perform all the other operations that so materially assisted him in marshalling stubborn words into sentences. It was not his companion's fault if he paused once or twice, or, indeed, rather oftener, to think how good it was of her so patiently to mend her old gloves; to wonder whether the neat little work-basket

had been pawned, or was a new acquisition ; to notice what beautiful hair she had, and what small ears, and how thin she was, and how white her skin, and to admire the little fringe of short crisp flossy hair upon the nape of her neck, as she sat with her back to him. Nor was it her fault that he spent all twenty minutes musing how good that life is where a woman is ever at one's side.

Notwithstanding these romantic interruptions, the sermon was at length brought to a close. For the last ten minutes Miss Valettas' work had been laid aside, and, flitting silently from bookshelf to bookshelf, she had amused herself with reading the titles of the books, a more promising volume being occasionally taken down and restored again to its place after a peep at its contents. Sarleigh, precluded from the long meditative regards that were so tempting when her back was turned towards him, consequently finished the last few pages of his manuscript more quickly than the earlier parts, and, with his pen in his mouth, spent several minutes composing something neat to say to the young lady concerning her command of her tongue. He was conscious, however, of

a sensation not experienced before, a dim shyness that made him timid about addressing her, and his pen was chewed to rags, and the compliment not yet coined, when she looked round, and said, in her pleasant way,

“You have finished. I may talk?”

Now for the compliment!

“If ever you want a character, Miss Valettas, for being not able—I mean for not being able to say anything——”

“You will give it me. Thank you. How very flattering. Not to be able to say anything! At any rate, I possess woman’s chief virtue—silence!”

“Oh! yes,” said Sarleigh, not yet recovered from his broken-backed compliment, and now rising from his chair, “only it is not what you say,—don’t say I mean; but, really, I felt it was so—so *nice* of you to sit sewing whilst I wrote.”

The pointed accentuation of “nice” made it, though difficult to say, very effective when said, so that the cleric coloured over it, and Bourbachokátzouli opened her eyes, and changed the subject of conversation. She had in her hand a Sophoklès.

"How I envy you," she said, "the ability to read this. I have forgotten Greek so much that I doubt whether I could read even one of our modern books now, and this is, of course, very different from the best of them. My father promised that, when I came home from Paris, we should live at Athens, and I should learn ancient Greek. He was a good scholar, and so fond of these books, and, dear me, how he used to scold me for my Cretan patois. They speak dreadful Greek in Crete. Tell me what this means."

Sarleigh stumbled through the passage she indicated without contriving to make any sense of it. He was, he explained, unfamiliar with the play. Bourbachokátzouli, ignorant enough to suppose that Englishmen learnt Greek as she had learnt English, looked surprised. He was still learning Greek, she suggested. He confessed that was true, in this sense, that he hoped to be much more familiar with it some day, but most likely not with the classics, but with the Fathers. Profane literature was beneath the attention of the clergy, who had something better to read than epics and tragedies, poems, romances, and similar works,

whether English or foreign, classical or not. The deacon became eloquent on this topic, and Miss Valettas a little surprised, and a good deal mystified, put the Sophoklés back on the shelf without venturing to express her sense of disappointment.

When she was putting on her hat to leave, Sarleigh mentioned, as if casually, having written to his sister. She was his favourite sister, he remarked, and he hoped she and Miss Valettas might some day meet, and be friends. Miss Valettas was evidently annoyed.

"You meant well," she said, "I am sure. But I am not sure you have done wisely. After all, a great deal depends on how she receives your letter. You have not told her, I hope, how I cried, or what a wretched plight I was in?"

"Why not?"

"I had rather you had not. I am ashamed, naturally, of being hungry and penniless, and in such an abject state. Yet, perhaps, as I hinted to Mr. Couton I knew her in a sort of way, it is as well to make it true."

"You told Mr. Couton that! But he knows my sister Alice; besides, I told him all the truth about you."

"Mon ami, you are very simple-minded. I thought it was arranged I was to say that. When you invent a fib, you ought either to keep to it, or at least to let those who are interested in it know when you are going to substitute a new one. I have always found it best to tell a good one to begin with, and then to adhere to it, till, by dint of repetition, it has come to be believed. I thought your first fib a good fib, but, if you mean to change it, what is now going to be said instead."

"I seriously hope you do not mean what you are saying. For the future, of course, I shall tell the truth."

"That means as much of the truth as you happen to know, or are pleased to tell, which I have generally found to be one of the most mischievous sorts of untruth."

"No ; it means the truth."

"Then if you are asked, for instance, if you feel assured that I am not an impostor, what shall you say?"

Now the deacon must either tell an untruth, or make a confession ; how ungrateful a confession, after some thoughts, he had thought this evening ! He held his tongue.

"Why not say, 'I only half trust her.' I have seen enough of suspicion in the last few weeks to know what it looks like."

"Miss Valettas, I do not wish to suspect you. It is not your fault that you have been in trouble."

"Are you sure of that?"

Again silence.

"It seems to me, Mr. Sarleigh, that a great part of your truthfulness consists in saying nothing, and leaving people to guess what it means. Don't look vexed. I am sadly incorrigible. I've enjoyed myself much more here than I should have in my own dull lodgings, where I ought to have been. So thank you for a pleasant evening, and for your company."

"Let me lend you some books to amuse yourself with. I ought to have thought of it before. Of course you must be dull all alone."

"Thanks ; but I have got back some of my books." She named one or two French works.

"Were they novels?" he asked, and looked excessively shocked when she said "Yes." He did not know much of French literature, but

had heard what French novels are said to be.

"Are those ladies' books?" he asked.

"Ladies read them—French ladies."

CHAPTER VII.

THE fire is blazing brightly in the breakfast-room of Grove House, Nanham, a moderate-sized, well-lighted room, oak furnished, and tastefully disposed. Some good engravings hang on the painted walls, and a handsome old-fashioned ebony clock ticks sedately between Chinese vases on the chimney-piece. Thick curtains drawn before the bow windows forbid the raw night air without to penetrate into the warm and pleasant room.

The door opens, and the ladies, who have just left the dinner-table, enter. First, a tall girl, who stops to hold the door for those who follow. This is Alice Sarleigh. Except that she is not so fair, she is remarkably like her brother. The first impression her face gives is

one of sweetness, the second that she is not really pretty. The outline of her cheeks is pure and soft, and she has bright smiling eyes and a good forehead, to which high eyebrows give a frank look. Yet the lines of her face want character, and would strike a close observer as flat. She has, too, the depressed mien of every girl too weak to resist a mother's caprices, and her profile is disappointing. Her manner, as she holds the door, lacks grace, and yet shows that the simple act is done, not from a formal courtesy, but with a real affection for those she serves.

With lagging steps, an exceedingly stout woman of sixty, above the middle height, follows, leaning, not for support, on the arm of a young girl much shorter than herself. Mrs. Sarleigh is not without traces of former beauty, and her plump face unites some of the good-natured traits of her eldest with some of the more picturesque ones of the second and favourite daughter at her side.

This is Ethel, a little, airy, fair thing, with delicate hands and feet, beautiful limbs, a maze of pale golden hair, and the coldest of cold grey eyes. She is little like her older brother

and sister, very like what her mother was once, only smaller and handsomer. Her eyebrows, darker than her hair, are straighter and more strongly marked than Alice's, her cheeks mantling with roses, not so full, her nose fine, and very slightly aquiline. The corners of her lips droop a little, lending a piquancy of faint melancholy to the lower part of an alluring face. Whether seen in full or in profile, when the fine, almost imperceptible bend of her nose, with its finished nostrils, and the round soft curves that nestle beneath her chin, are unrivalled for beauty, her face possesses the expressive harmony of unlike forms that elicits immediate interest and admiration.

That Ethel Sarleigh knows how beautiful a woman she is is plain from her every glance and motion, breathing the cultivated vanity that understands how to be vain with grace. For the present, youth throws its charm over faults that may ultimately make her an odious woman. In the way she leads her mother, the dramatic courtesy of an actress who intends her entrance to bring down the house is palpable, and her soft, "Thanks, Alice," has the concentrated earnestness with which only

an idolized lover would be thanked for holding open a door. She is not only more fashionably, but much more expensively, dressed than her sister.

Behind them follows Mrs. Sarleigh's third daughter, Lilian, two years Ethel's junior, and in appearance two years Alice's senior. She is a painful example of the power of nature to cast out of the same mould, by the slightest dissimilitude, types of refined beauty and repulsive ugliness.

Feature by feature, the similarity between Ethel and Lilian is amazing; they might be recognized as sisters by one who had seen but a portrait of one of them. Lilian has Ethel's grey eyes, fair skin, and aquiline nose. Her mouth is larger, certainly, but the contrast does not lie about her mouth. The same forms that in Ethel's face are refined, are in Lilian's inexplicably rigid and crude. Her yellow hair is dull, her grey eyes lifeless, her complexion unhealthy. And yet her uninviting features have the same attention-compelling force as her sister's. She is thin, and looks ill, and, which is still more detrimental to personal appearance, has the air of a girl pur-

posely slovenly. She walks leaning forward, her hands behind her back, and a book stuck askew under her arm, after the fashion of a country parish clerk going to a funeral. Her dress is almost shabby. To conclude, the striking difference between these two girls may be understood from this, that, though they are of the same height, and Ethel weighs more than Lilian, the latter looks shorter and more heavily built.

There being no men at Grove House (Mrs. Sarleigh has been long a widow), the mother and daughters sit down around the fire, without the disturbing consciousness of men about presently to appear. The old lady has her knitting; Alice is engaged in carefully winding some wool into a ball for her mother; Ethel lounges idly in a rocking-chair; whilst Lilian places herself at the table, and begins reading, and biting her nails.

It was not long before the interest of the little party was awakened by the familiar sharp-double knock of the postman.

"There is the postman. I wonder whether I shall have an answer from the jewellers," said Ethel.

A servant entered with letters on a salver—one for Alice, and one for Ethel.

"Is it from the jeweller, dear?" asked Mrs. Sarleigh, looking up.

"They want thirty guineas for the earrings and brooch," replied Ethel, after a pause.

"That is a good deal, my dear."

"Very well, mammy dear; if it is too much I can't have them," said Ethel, crushing up the letter into a ball and preparing to throw it into the fire, whilst her looks proclaimed her dissatisfaction.

"Don't burn the letter, dear; we'll think about it, and see what can be done. I don't want to disappoint you."

"Ethel will have them, depend upon it," observed Lilian, without looking up from her book.

"And if I do I shall look well in them, which is more than you would," retorted Ethel, instantly.

"I have a letter from Fred, mamma," said Alice, interrupting, in order to prevent a scene.

"Then you had better amuse yourself with reading it," observed Ethel. "Do you think,

mamma, I could perhaps have the brooch and earrings?"

"I'll see, dear, I'll see. I won't disappoint you if I can help it. What does Fred say, Alice?"

"Oh, mamma, he has had such an adventure! Last night a young Greek lady came to him in great distress; she was going to drown herself, and he persuaded her not to do so."

"We shall hear he is going to marry her next, I suppose," remarked Lilian.

"Is she good-looking, Alice?" asked Ethel.
"I don't want another ugly sister."

"He does not say."

"What does he say?"

"Read it out, Ethel," said Mrs. Sarleigh.

Alice handed the letter to her sister.

Mrs. Sarleigh never understood letters read aloud by anyone else, though Ethel's reading was not remarkably good nor distinct. When the letter was finished, Alice said,

"I wish I had been there; I should like to have seen her. If I could only have stayed a little longer with Fred!"

"Nobody wanted you to come back here," said Lilian.

"Ah, but Fred did not want me any longer with him in town. He has his reading to do for his priest's orders. Poor girl! I do feel sorry for her. I hope Fred will be able to get her out of her troubles. If she is nice, we might ask her here, mamma. Of course she and Fred will always be great friends after this. I wonder whether she is nice."

"You'd think her nice," put in Ethel; "you always think everybody nice."

"Even you," quoth Lilian.

"I wonder at you, Lilian," exclaimed Mrs. Sarleigh, turning round, crossly; "how dare you speak to Ethel so. Your bitter tongue is the plague of the house!"

"Never mind her, mammy dear," said Ethel; "it is only poor Lily's way, and I don't mind it. Do I, Lily love?"

Lilian, with the wilful inattention of a sul-
len disposition, made as though she had heard
neither speech.

"I wish I knew what this girl is called,"
continued Alice, returning to the subject of
her letter. "Fred says she has been a gov-
erness. Do we know anyone who wants a
governess?"

"My dear Alice," said her mother, "we had better leave all that to Fred. Clergymen meet with all sorts of people, and we know very little about this young lady."

Alice never contradicted her mother. She folded up her letter without saying more, a little hurt and disappointed, but too dutiful to show it.

"I expect Fred's been gulled again," said Lilian.

"You would feel certain of it, if you heard the lady was good-looking, would you not, Lily?" asked Ethel.

"Cock sure!"

"I wonder what she is like. If she is pretty I should like to see her. A Greek beauty would be something new. We might invite her to visit us if she is really a nice girl, might we not, mamma?"

"Eh, my dear? I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon," said the old lady, who had taken up her knitting, and ceased to listen to her girls' conversation.

"If Fred's new friend is nice, we might ask her to spend a day or two with us, might we not?"

"I daresay we could manage it, Ethel, if you wish to see her; of course, supposing she is a really ladylike girl."

It will be unnecessary to record further the ensuing discussion of Miss Valettas. The letter was read again, and all the possible meanings extracted from its sentences. At length the little party broke up. Lilian kissed her mother on the cheek, and said "Good night, dear," Alice on the lips, with "Good night, mamma." Ethel led the old lady upstairs, helped to undress her, and to arrange her physics, and possets, and footwarmer, and nightlight. Then she put her pretty arms round her, and kissed her some dozen times, bidding her sleep well, and enjoy pleasant dreams. Though this little comedy was acted every night, it never failed to affect Mrs. Sarleigh. When Ethel left the room the coveted brooch and earrings had been promised her.

Alice, in the meantime, wrote to Miss Valettas.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"My brother has written to tell us,"—she wrote first, "how you came to him in

trouble,"—but it seemed unkind to remind the stranger of her misfortunes, and so Alice destroyed what she had penned, and wrote instead—"to tell us of you. We are all so glad you came to him, and that he was able to help you. I was quite unhappy when I read of your being in our country, and not having a single friend. You must think us such a heartless people. Pardon my writing, and let me offer to be your friend, so that you may not think us English all unkind to strangers. I hope my brother may be able to introduce you to kind and useful people, who will have something more substantial to offer you than the humble good-will of

"Your sincere friend,

"ALICE SARLEIGH.

"P.S.—My brother has not told us your name, so please excuse the quaint address."

The letter was directed to

*The Greek Lady,
Care of
Rev. F. Sarleigh.*

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day Miss Valettas spent at the Vicarage turned out, as she had anticipated, distinctly dull. Mr. Couton and his wife treated her with courtesy and marked kindness, did all they could, in short, to make her feel herself among friends. She enjoyed her meals, and a stroll round the tiny garden, whilst the February sun vouchsafed some pale sunshine, and Mr. Couton related his few, not very successful, essays in foreign travel, pausing frequently to point out some beauty in each of his humble flowers, a few snowdrops, crocuses, primroses, and a promise of Lent lilies. He pleased her at dinner by a pretty speech, in which, refreshing his last vanishing recollections of Homer, he alluded to "*Ἑλλάδα καλλιγύναικα*:" but when she was afterwards talking despondently of her

prospects, and he, willing to cheer her, assured her she would have no more to bear than He chose Who was παντελήμων, she did not understand him, and the point of the apt Greek word was lost, though the significant friendliness of a word meant to be comprehended by one hearer only was not.

The Vicarage was a house where a heavy routine of humble work went on day by day, and Mrs. Couton found her guest plenty of employment of the common-place and monotonous kind. "I am sorry to set you to work, Miss Valettas," she said, apologetically, "but if you and I are to spend a day together we must work together." Which they did. Bourbachokátzouli toiled good-humouredly, and made a favourable impression on her ever-watchful hostess, both by her good-natured wish to be helpful, and by a very frank confession, towards the end of the day, that she was "awfully tired."

In the afternoon, whilst they were folding a mountain of clothes, the handiwork of some charitable society, a certain Mrs. Tansley called. This was a big woman, with an odd, fat face, very large, and all one colour—a phenomenon

of round protuberances moulded like potatoes. After being introduced to Miss Valettas, she sat down, and in a small, rattling voice commenced explaining the cause of her visit. Her speech, at times, was of the kind that is scarcely intelligible when spoken, and almost or absolutely unintelligible when written down.

“I came, my dear Mrs. Couton, to tell you I met Mr. Couton. I had been to visit Mrs. Potter, poor thing! in Clayton Street—they seem very respectable people, she and her husband—and I happened to meet Mr. Couton: As I had been calling on Mrs. Potter, and she is to have, the doctor says, some port wine—Mrs. Potter—I thought I had better speak to him at once—Mr. Couton, I mean—and talk to him about it—the port wine. So I told Mr. Couton about the wine—her having some—Mrs. Potter—and he said I had better come to you. He said you knew how much there was still to be given away—wine. I’m sure I’m very sorry to trouble you, only I should not have come, only I met Mr. Couton, and he said I had better—when I asked him—come to you. I asked him what I had better do about it—the wine—

and he thought you knew all about it. So you see, I have come, as he said. I thought you would like to know what he said—Mr. Couton.”

During her speech, Mrs. Tansley kept her hands folded together in her lap, like a good child saying a lesson, except that occasionally she raised them and gently patted together the tips of her fingers. When she had got thus far, Mrs. Couton replied that she should certainly have the wine for the sick woman.

“Yes, yes, yes,” replied Mrs. Tansley, evidently annoyed at being interrupted. “That was what Mr. Couton said; he said you would give me some. I thought, perhaps, he would somehow have given me an order for it at once—the wine—but he told me I had better come to you, and get you to give me some for her—Mrs. Potter. He has set up as a shoe-maker—Potter—but I think they are very poor, and not very well off. They cannot pay the rent, and it has not been paid lately. The landlord says he shall turn them out—the Potters. I’m hopeful he won’t though, and trust he will let them stay. I’m sorry to have

troubled you about the wine, but, when I asked Mr. Couton, he told me you would know what there is to be given away, and she is to have it—Mrs. Potter—he says—the wine—the doctor. She does not like the street—the houses in it—Mrs. Potter—they are so unhealthy, and not at all wholesome, and I think they have made them all ill somehow, according to my idea, and so does he—the doctor—I mean the Potters. But there, if they have the wine, perhaps they may get better. I told him all about it—Mr. Couton—and how dreadfully she wanted it, poor thing! or I should not have come to trouble you, only knowing how badly they are off, and Mr. Couton having said that I had better speak about them—the Potters—to you, myself.”

An hour and a quarter, during which Mrs. Tansley repeated her tumbled sentences, with the monotony of an axe chopping timber, elapsed before she rose from her seat, and, taking the half-pint bottle of port the servant had long before brought into the room, prepared to go. After that she stood for another three quarters of an hour talking to Miss Valettas, trying to find out all she could, asking questions and

impatiently interrupting in the middle of the replies. Did Miss Valettas know she had been a lodger in her street? She called it her street, because it was the street in which she visited the poor. How unfortunate it was that Miss Valettas had not applied to her for assistance! She should so like to hear all about Miss Valettas' misfortunes. She knew the Hudsons; "they were very unsatisfactory, and not at all satisfactory." A friend had told her all about Miss Valettas, but she should like to hear more. She felt the deepest interest in Miss Valettas' misfortunes, and so thankful that dear good Mr. Sarleigh had been able to assist her. Her friend had told her how she had come to Mr. Sarleigh in the deepest despair, and how he had persuaded her not to do anything desperate. She felt how anxious Mr. Sarleigh must have been to do all in his power to help Miss Valettas, when he found she was in such dreadful trouble, and not at all happy. It would have given herself much pleasure to help Miss Valettas, if she had appealed to her whilst she was lodging in her street. How unfortunate that she should ever have come to live in such a dreadful place! Of course, Miss Valettas

must have met with great misfortunes ; she should so like to hear all about it some day, when Miss Valettas had time to tell her. She was so sorry she had even had to pawn her things. That was so demeaning. So she must have felt it. She should so like to be of some service to Miss Valettas. What did she mean to do ? Mr. and Mrs. Tansley were both entirely at her service.

Bourbachokátzouli heard, bowed her silent thanks, and shuddered. All the ignominy of her beggarly despair, the gossip of such a tongue as this ! Their shame heralded makes women shameless, and she set her teeth together and looked straight into Mrs. Tansley's face a look of stubborn nonchalance, reckless that the next crony the loquacious woman met might hear, "And oh, she looks insolent—quite insolent and shameful ! The look she gave me was quite insolent, and not at all humble. You can see she does not care, and is quite indifferent—Miss Valettas. I saw her myself and spoke to her, and she looked somehow quite insolent."

When, at last, she was gone, Mrs. Couton said,

"I fear, Miss Valettas, Mrs. Tansley hurt you."

"No, Mrs. Couton, thank you."

"But I think your looks betrayed the truth that she did hurt you."

"I am sorry I was so indiscreet."

"I only feared you would say something imprudent."

Miss Valettas had on her lips, "For her to repeat, I know better," but she only said,

"I thought it wiser to say nothing."

"You are right. For my part, I am thankful when Mrs. Tansley is here, though she is very tiresome, and sorry to see her go. Whilst she is with me I know what she is saying, and that I can help its being repeated. But when she has left, I know neither what she is saying, nor to whom."

Before Bourbachokátzouli left the Vicarage, a proposal was made, to which, though it came most unwelcome, she saw it was necessary to accede, and graciously. This proposal was that, as some days, at least, would probably elapse before she obtained an engagement, she should in the interim accept the hospitality of the Sisterhood. There were there plenty of

empty rooms and empty beds; meals would cost less than at her lodgings; and being a visitor at the convent was in itself a recommendation which living in private apartments in a not very select part of London was not. Mrs. Couton inclined to think that the Sisterhood would in some ways also be more comfortable. The sisters would give Miss Valettas a nice little room; if she liked, she could help them in their schools; and at any rate she would be among ladies, the sisters and their visitors.

"I think your proposal very kind, Mrs. Couton, and very opportune. I hope you won't think me rude or ungracious, but"—she paused for nearly a minute, and then said, "the sisters have many claims on their charity. I ought not to be an expense to them, and I don't see——"

"Nonsense, Miss Valettas! say what you mean at once."

"I am ashamed, then, of being a beggar, and the fewer people know it the better I am pleased."

"I should have felt the same at your age, but as it is——"

"Seeing I am a beggar."

"Now I did not say that, Miss Valettas," replied Mrs. Couton. "The fact is, the sisters may as well spend some trouble on you as on anyone else. They won't let you feel oppressed by a heavy burden of gratitude."

"The more they do to prevent my feeling under an obligation, the more I shall feel it."

"That's very generous of you, my dear, but not at all what I meant. Don't alarm yourself about the debt of gratitude you'll feel. At any rate, think the matter over, and we will see what can be done."

Miss Valettas thought it over, and spoke of it to Sarleigh, who agreed in every particular with Mrs. Couton. Evidently the Sisterhood was inevitable.

"I hope I shall not be there long," owned Bourbachokátzouli, bluntly.

In spite of the valuable kindness of Mr. Couton and his wife, the visit to Chiswick on the following afternoon proved far more exhilarating to Miss Valettas's spirits than the day spent at the Vicarage. The journey to Chiswick certainly was not pleasant. On the road

Sarleigh irritated his companion, first by seeming reluctant to be seen with her, afterwards by his irksome shyness, which made him timid of addressing her one minute, and assumingly familiar the next.

In the morning it rained, and he hinted if the rain continued they would not be able to go, and that in a manner which showed he would little regret it. When they did go, at the station he spied on the platform some one he knew, and anxiously avoided being seen, even saying to Miss Valettas, "There is So-and-so, I had rather he did not see us." In the train, when they were alone in the compartment, he wanted to talk in a half sentimental, half patronizing way of friendship and sympathy, and to discuss affection in the abstract, after the manner of lovers *in petto*. On a third person entering he was immediately silenced, and made as though he was not travelling with Miss Valettas, who, out of revenge, as soon as she understood his whim, began to chatter with him familiarly. Not designing, however, to have such condescension misinterpreted, she relapsed into icy monosyllables as soon as they left the train, and when Sarleigh inquired, in a

crestfallen tone, at what time she would wish to return, said, "She was ready to go back now if he did not wish to go any further."

Mr. Montenotte's house was a large, ugly, red brick, building, of the last century. Its façade showed two upper rows of five uniform, tall, somewhat narrow, windows, with thick and staring white window frames. Beneath them, in the centre, was a door, flanked by Ionic columns, and on either side of it two more windows similar to those above. Two bands of redder brick marked the division of the storeys. A pediment adorned the summit, and hid part of the tiled roof behind. The house stood back from the road, behind a few fine elms, beneath which a holly-hedge grew, pushing its branches into the interstices of the thick wooden railing with heavy turned posts, that separated the premises from the highway. That afternoon the pale, cloudless, February sky looked very blue behind the red house, and the leafless trees, still wet with the morning's rain, brightly, piteously cold.

When Sarleigh and his friend arrived, Montenotte was sitting by the fire in a room adjoining the dining-room. This chamber, his father's

favourite habitat, was a square room, pannelled and painted grey, that seemed, on account of the number of things it contained, smaller than it was. Its one window, before which stood a little round table, commanded a view, at present a drear one, of an avenue of limes running down one side of the garden. On the walls hung the choicest pictures in the house, and about the room were bronzes, ivories, and pottery, the gems of the old artist's collections, who loved to live with the rarest of his treasures around him, averring that his enjoyment of them could be but short at the best. Some of the furniture boasted considerable value and antiquity, the rest was modern and more comfortable. One of the recesses at the side of the fireplace was occupied by a piano. Though designed only to be pleasant, the room, owing to its inmates' taste, presented a whole that was effectively picturesque.

Miss Valettas' ill-humour was instantly dispelled by the look of surprised pleasure which, on entering with Sarleigh, she caught on Montenotte's face, a confession that he had hardly expected she would come, and had at the same time wished it. Inviting her to take off her furs,

he took them from her, mentally commenting on the improvement in her apparel since they last met. Then he proposed a chat by the cosy fireside, and a good warming after the cold ride in the train, as the best prelude to looking at pictures. But Sarleigh declared this impossible, saying at some length that they had no time to spare, that they had far to return, and that he could not stay late. Meantime Miss Valettas stood looking about her, admiring a picture over the chimney-piece and some jars placed on the top of a Brazilian cabinet.

Montenotte now led the way to where the Spanish sketches had been hung. They were exquisite little things, but it was plain Miss Valettas did not care for them. The artist noticed it, and said,

"You do not like these really beautiful pictures, Miss Valettas. You know, coming into an artist's house is like being examined. You are sure to show what you like and do not like. You cannot help it. Now be bold, and say what you think about the things you see."

"To begin, then, I think, if you have nothing more interesting than these to show us, we will go and talk by the fire."

"If you will. Only first let me show you something you may like better."

Followed by Sarleigh, she accompanied him to a sort of gallery formed by a large landing at the head of the staircase. He stopped before a picture, and asked,

"Do you like this?"

"I want to see your pictures, if you please. Did you paint this?"

"Yes."

"Pigs and chickens! They are certainly very like pigs. Horrid things!"

"Really, Miss Valettas, you are hard to please. Look at this."

She turned at his request and looked at a picture hanging opposite the pigs and chickens. It was a daring piece of colouring, representing a young woman and a middle-aged man standing on the balcony of a gaming saloon. The brilliant light from the room fell, somewhat broken, on their faces and figures. The man was offering the girl money, evidently upon terms she was unable or unwilling to accept. The eager, sinister expression of his features contrasted with the pale despair of hers. She was toying, apparently unconsciously, with the

wedding-ring on her left hand, an act that betrayed the drift of her unspoken thoughts.

"Oh, I do like that!" exclaimed Bourbachokátzouli. "Is it yours?"

"No."

Her face fell. "I wish," she said, "you had not shown me the pigs. You told me to say what I thought, and I like this so much better. I hope you won't consider me ill-natured."

"Not at all. This was painted by a little man who, when I was a boy, had drawing lessons with me. You see how far he is now in advance of me. I only paint pigs, and he paints——"

"Passions. Oh, poor girl! You see, she is playing with her wedding-ring. She has ruined her husband and her home as well as herself. And this wretch could, and won't, help her. It makes one's heart ache to know how it ended. What a lovely face! Poor thing! What fiends you men are to us in our troubles!"

"But what a wicked woman, a gambler!" put in Sarleigh, so breaking the spell the picture had wrought over Miss Valettas.

She looked round quickly, and said, in a contemptuous tone,

"And pray, Mr. Sarleigh, is all your pity reserved for the innocent?"

"The innocent deserve our pity."

"Innocence needs nobody's pity. Mr. Montenotte, does not that picture make you just a little tiny bit jealous? I know I am being rude, but I am to say what I like."

"Jealous of the man in the picture? Yes, a little. I am conceited enough to think I, under the same circumstances, should have behaved better than he seems to be doing, not have been quite such a 'fiend.'"

She looked at him, and for an instant their eyes met.

Then she said,

"That was not what I meant. I don't think you thought it was. Will you forgive me for asking again, are you not jealous of the man who painted that picture?"

"Not a bit. It is far better than I could have done. It would be a sorry thing, though, if nobody could do anything I cannot."

"But other people's success, your old compeers! if you really are not jealous of it, not a little bit, which I cannot understand, I should like to know how that is."

"Could nobody do anything I cannot, would the world be as happy as it is?"

He asked it in a manner that showed he was anxious to be understood by her.

"I do not find the world a particularly happy place as it is," she replied, "but I see what you mean."

"Could you wish the happiness of all brought down to what you alone could make it?"

"No, I could not be so selfish. You are right to be pleased at this man's painting what you cannot, and I feel with you now. But I should like you to paint like that too."

He conducted them next to the studio. The appearance of an artist's studio, its great windows and skylight, its strange collection of properties, its disorder, the sketches pinned on the walls, the screens, the lay-figures, and half-finished pictures can need no description: they must be as familiar to modern readers as the grove of Mars and the cave of Vulcan were to Juvenal. On entering, without once looking to right or left, Miss Valettas walked up to a large picture on one of the easels, and began scrutinizing it. Montenotte concluded this was not her first visit to a studio.

"Is this yours?" she asked, indicating the picture before her.

"No, my father's. Do you like it?"

"I like the central group, and I don't like some of the spectators."

"Why not, please?"

"This is the return of Heraklès with Alkèstis, is it not?" (She called them Erakleès and A'lkeestees, and it was a few seconds before he understood her and replied in the affirmative.) She continued, "All these attendants and guests look exactly as they ought to look, pleased or astonished, and so on."

"And how would you have them look?"

"I would have them look as they do in the picture. Only you may be sure that is not how they did look. A number of people never look exactly as they should. Count. There are twelve or more women servants in the picture. Do you think that amongst all those there was not one who was glad to be rid of her mistress and sorry to see her back again? Suppose you brought a dead woman back alive into a room full of servants, would not three quarters of them scream and take to their heels? And don't you think there would be some one

among them who would feel sure the whole affair was a hoax, and that Alkêstis had never died? Imagine the look this old slave's wizened face would wear, if he supposed the whole thing was a trick. Then there are all these handsome Greek slave girls. I am certain more than one of those young ladies would have been impudent enough to imagine her master might take a fancy to herself, and have resented Alkêstis' return as nothing short of a cruel injustice. This saucy girl, for example, might have had some foolish ambitions."

"Would not your alterations make the scene a comic one?"

"I think not, because these details need not be all introduced, or might be subdued or placed in subsidiary places. To appear very tragic, any scene must of course be expressed a little unnaturally, because men and women are so woefully ridiculous. But I think, by excluding the great jester, truth, you diminish the force of the picture: or worse, you suggest to mischievous people like poor me, what is more ludicrous than anything else, that most of these serious folks were laughing in their sleeves whilst they kept up their solemn appearance.

For a ridiculous side everything has, and some people will see it."

Montenotte, who had listened with profound attention, said he should tell his father what she said. To this Bourbachokátzouli objected, protesting she would give no further opinions. Pressed to show her some more of his own work, he next fetched from where they were leaning with their faces against the wall, one or two historical pieces, a landscape, and a picture of a man walking away from a girl. He placed them one after another on an easel before her. She looked at them for a longer time than they merited. Concerning the last she asked,

"What is this?"

"In love the only real farewell is the one that is not spoken."

"Good. Have you a salon in London, as they have in Paris?"

"The Academy."

"Do you send pictures to it?"

"I did not last year, nor the year before."

"Why not? You can paint. Finish 'The Farewell,' and send it."

"I expect I shall not. Look at this." He drew a splendid etching by Rembrandt from a

portfolio, and threw it on the table. "What do you think of that? Better than 'Farewell,' isn't it?"

"Of course it is, Mr. Montenotte. But does not a picture like this make you want to try your best."

"No. Generally such pictures dishearten me utterly, their excellence is so unattainable. And sometimes, lately, I have thought people had better spend their time looking at the merest trifle these great men wrought, than at anything I am ever likely to do at my best."

"But you ought to be doing."

"Is it any good?"

"Ah! now he is on his hobby, Miss Valettas," said Sarleigh. "You'll never hear the end of that theme 'is it any good?'"

"No, I will not weary you with my hobby," replied Montenotte, almost humbly, "only, tell me, shall I be doing any good?"

"Art makes life brighter."

"Does it make it any better?"

"Oh! really, Mr. Montenotte, that is a question beyond me. I know what pleasure means, and pain. If art gives pleasure?"

"Is all pleasure good?"

"All good pleasure."

The artist laughed, and for once Bourbachokátzouli looked perplexed, though not for long.

"Laugh at me," she said, joining in his laugh, "for not being able to express myself, if you like, but venture your best, and send 'Farewell' to the salon. It is wrong of you not to paint."

They returned from the studio to the little sitting-room, loitering on the stairs and in the hall and dining-room, to look at one picture or another, till the early evening drew on. Montenotte, despite Sarleigh's expostulations, insisted that Miss Valettas should have some afternoon tea before she left, and, intent upon procuring it as quickly as possible, excused himself, and left them alone for a few minutes, Bourbachokátzouli on a cosy little chair by the fireside, enchanted with the taste, peace, wealth, ease, and pleasantness of all around her, and Sarleigh impatiently pacing the room with his hat in his hand.

"Really," said the deacon, "these rich people ought to be ashamed of themselves, Miss Valettas. To live in luxury whilst others want is a

positive sin. The contents of this room are, I know, worth a fortune, and you yourself, now seated in the midst of it, have nearly perished of want, whilst these people have been living in soul-destroying luxury. I've spoken to my mother about it at home, and I shall speak to Montenotte, and very plainly. His whole character is cankered with the idleness of wealth. How can you feel in a room like this?"

"I feel very comfortable, thank you."

"Do you not feel the injustice of others having enough to waste wickedly, whilst so many, yourself included, want?"

"I do not grudge your friends their happiness."

"Any more than I grudge my friends their artistic triumphs, eh, Miss Valettas?" said Montenotte, who had entered unnoticed. "Now, Sarleigh, let us hear your sermon on the sin of luxury, and the merits of dirty cooking. It will amuse us till tea time."

"If you have heard what Mr. Sarleigh has been saying to me, I am very much ashamed of it," said Miss Valettas, looking mortified.

"Sarleigh is famed for making infelicitous remarks."

"What I say is well enough, if I had different people to hear it," retorted the cleric, in self-defence.

"Mr. Montenotte," asked Miss Valettas, "may I play on the piano? I love music, and have not had an opportunity of playing for months."

Assenting with pleasure, the artist opened the piano whilst she drew off her gloves. She sat down and began to play. At first her fingers wandered idly over the keyboard, waking broken fugitive harmonies, then she commenced quietly playing one of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words.

Montenotte listened with bated breath. There could be no mistaking the truth; her execution was magnificent, and her taste of the most refined. He had the whole afternoon been awaiting some display of signal character or power, such as he deemed he had recognized in her photograph and her behaviour at their first interview, and at last he had lighted on it. He turned to look at her. Her whole being was immersed in her music. Everything else forgotten, she was playing to herself. When she paused, he added to his thanks for the treat she had given him, "though

I am sure," he remarked, "you had become quite unconscious that anyone was listening to you," a request for a song, a Greek song, if she remembered one. She played a short prelude, and began to sing to a singular air one of the popular ditties of her native island.

Πέ μου, νὰ ζήσης, Πέδικα.

"Partridge, tell me where thy nest is,
And I swear to set thee free."

"Royal Eagle, loose thy talons,
I will tell thee : woe is me !

"See yon hill where pink carnations
Bloom, and see the rock below :
There I laid my eggs and hatched them.
I have told thee. Let me go."

Loosed his claws, the hungry eagle,
Sped to seek the dainty prey.

"But my small birds," laughed the Partridge,
"Are all fledged and flown away!"

The song ended, Bourbachokátzouli rose from the piano, and, declining to sing or play any more, returned Montenotte's thanks for her music, with an assurance that it had been an intense pleasure to her again to touch the keys, after spending months without the art of which she was so passionately fond. He pressed her to promise to come some day to luncheon, when his father and mother were at

home. She only replied that all her plans were too unsettled to allow her to make arrangements for the future. Sarleigh having become by this time frantic about returning, Montenegro assisted Miss Valettas to put on her cloak, and then accompanied his guests as far as the gate. On their way he stopped Miss Valettas to show her the reflection of light in the clouded sky in the east above the city.

"Is it indeed the lights in London that make that dull gleam in the sky?" she asked. "Hateful London, it haunts me everywhere!"

"Do you hate London then?"

"With all my heart."

"You hate the place where thousands of thousands live and love, and labour and hope?"

"I never thought of it in that way."

They walked the rest of the short distance to the gate in silence.

On the way home she said to Sarleigh,

"I like your friend Mr. Montenegro. He thinks, like a clever man should, differently from other men. What he says gives one something to muse over. If he would work he would succeed, I am sure. I have known a good many artists."

"I hope our going to see him won't be talked about," replied Sarleigh, gloomily.

"If you hope that, mon ami, you'll be disappointed," returned his insouciant companion.

CHAPTER IX.

THE impression a woman leaves often differs materially from the real issue of interchange of thought with her. Montenotte returned from the gate to the fireside disappointed with his visitor. He had anticipated an unintermittent display of originality, more wit, more coquetry, and a touch of picturesque pensiveness colouring all. He had promised himself that whilst talking over the pictures she should not fail to unmask a little, and that so an opportunity would be afforded of accurately reading her, of appreciating the sincerity or artificiality of her character, or the proportions in which both were combined to produce it. As a matter of fact, it was the quite insignificant advance he had made in any real knowledge of her, not her behaviour, that disappointed him.

Of course, he did not know this. He threw himself idly on a chair (it happened to be that on which she had sat, but he did not notice it) and mentally calculated the value of his Greek friend much as follows :

“Miss Valettas is disappointing, exactly like any other woman, with a trifle more impudence, and a trifle less sincerity, if that be possible. Good-looking she is, in the delusive style that leads fools to expect more than looks. She has a fine voice, and plays remarkably well. Also she has got herself into a scrape, like many other girls. What the scrape is, a big one unless I am mistaken, it is probably wisest not to inquire. Really bad ? No, it is not just to think that of her. An actress ? I think not, that is, not more than every other female. Sensitive ? Yes, I fear so, in the melo-dramatic way. An interesting problem ? No, the solution lies on the surface. She is simply young, pretty, and poor. That is always picturesque. Any other girl young, pretty, and poor, will do as well. Is there such a thing as a woman different from other women ? There was once, now there is not. Nature is no artist, that is the truth ; she got a reputation long ago, and has

rattled off daubs by the hundred ever since. If Rosa Mantle were poor, and in a mess, and Bourbachokátzouli Valettas (whose god-parents ought to have been drowned in the font before they gave her that awful name) had a comfortable income, &c., Rosa would be Bourbachokátzouli, and Bourbachokátzouli Rosa. Would Rosa also develop sufficient impudence to pretend to know a good picture from a bad one, and to tell me that my rough beginning of 'The Farewell' is better than 'Pigs and Chickens,' for the sake of flattering me by recognizing in my humble self a man of promise? An amusing problem. I could almost wish the fair Rosa poor to know the answer. I opine that, poverty being the mother of adulation, Miss Mantle would rival even Miss Valettas. The latter has the more significant face, but I prefer less promise and more performance. I wonder what sort of woman the Valettas really is? Shall I ever see her again?" ("Shall I ever see her again?" is, by-the-by, a question a man never asks about a woman who has not interested him.) "I suppose she will live somewhere in London. She will do very well for Sarleigh to marry, and can play the organ for him when he has a

country church of his own, which is all he will ever be fit for."

Montenotte stretched himself and yawned.

"Certainly Sarleigh is a fool," he said aloud, rising and standing with his back to the fire. "Luxury!" He made an impatient gesture, and, putting his hands behind him, continued his train of thought. "What is luxury? To sit in a soft chair, to have one's chops properly cooked, and brought to table on a clean plate. That is indulging in delights forbidden to mortals here below. Sarleigh is a bigger baby than I thought him. Poor match for Miss Valettas, Self-indulgence! To eat, drink, and walk about, and to be absolutely sure that I am not quite so much use in the world as this chair." He kicked over the chair in which he had been sitting. "That is a luxurious existence, forsooth! I think I shall frustrate my dear mother's scheme concerning Rosa Mantle (which scheme my mother, good soul, thinks I do not suspect) and turn day-labourer. These are our only real benefactors. The man that built the house and the man that dug the coals have done more for my happiness than Shakspeare, Tintoretto, and the inventor of

barrel organs together. Their works can be understood without fatigue. I, on the other hand, am of less use than an arm-chair. I might turn my hand to making arm-chairs, and distributing them gratis amongst the community. I should injure the labour market, and pauperize the nation. Labour is vanity, like everything else. Only how am I to be of any use in the world? That was a daring falsehood Miss Valettas told when she said I had talent. I should like to know what she knows about talent! Paint! Not I. I shall marry Rosa Mantle, please my mother, rile the governor, and be for ever after saved the trouble of thinking what I shall do next, for I know she will order me about like a galley slave. These silly women are always tyrants. I shall teach her to be sillier than she is now, by letting her go her own way to perdition even more freely than her father does. Then some day she will see a man who would have done her some good. Sequel, Montenotte *versus* Montenotte and somebody else. A fine piece of work I shall have done in bringing poor Rosa to that! I'd better paint than do that. Spoilt canvas won't cry to heaven for vengeance, and ruined flesh and

blood might with reason. But what ought I to do !”

He set on its legs again the chair he had kicked over, shut up the piano, and rang for the tea-things to be taken away. His mother did not like to see the room untidy.

At dinner-time he said to his father,

“Sarleigh was here this afternoon. He brought a friend of his sister’s with him, some foreign girl who is staying in London, a saucy piece of mortality.”

“I suppose Sarleigh brought her to see the dogs,” said Mr. Montenotte. He was an old man. An enormous quantity of white hair around his rather rubicund face made it appear redder than it was.

His son replied they had not come to see the dogs but the pictures.

“What did you show her?”

“Different things.”

“Did she know anything?”

“Not much. I showed her your picture of Heraklès and Alkèstis.”

“What did she say to that, take it for a tea-party?”

Montenotte briefly reported Bourbachokát-

zouli's comments. At the end, his father, who had listened with an attention he little anticipated, asked,

"How long did it take her to think of all that?"

"Not a minute. It all came out pat."

"Dence it did."

The old man rose from the table and left the room.

"There, Hugh, how can you be so thoughtless?" exclaimed Mrs. Montenotte. "You know if you begin talking about his pictures, your father forgets everything else. I daresay he won't come back for an hour, and it is so important that he should have his meals regularly. Now do go and try to persuade him to come back."

He rose at her bidding, and the servants having taken the soup away to be kept warm, and brought her her work-basket, Mrs. Montenotte sat patiently sewing until the men returned. She was a tall, thin woman, once good-looking, of good birth, and possessed of considerable fortune. She ran away with her drawing-master at eighteen, and had spent the rest of her existence in discovering that the

only use she could be to a man, with whom she had not a thought in common, was to look after his material comfort, and not to stand in his light. Most people pitied her, in all probability without reason. She was one of the many empty women, and her life, inseparable from her own inanity, would have been just as empty under other circumstances. The pitiable lot was her husband's. But his trial lay in the obscure regions of intelligence, of which men, in calculating other's lives, make no account. So no one commiserated him, nor his sore mortification of living bound by the closest ties to a woman to whom his thought was unintelligible and his life's purposes all blanks.

At the end of twenty minutes Montenotte and his father returned, and dinner was recommenced. The old man, entirely immersed in some new ideas of his picture, ate scarcely anything, and said nothing. His son tried to make some conversation for his mother, not very successfully, as she was anxious about her husband's appetite. The consideration his father bestowed upon Miss Valettas' suggestions surprised Montenotte. To him they appeared of little value, and certainly unworthy of the pro-

longed discussion for and against every particular, which occupied the old man's mind during the evening, and revealed itself by an unusual pre-occupation and restlessness, broken by remarks addressed to his son concerning the difficulty of improving, the danger of spoiling, and the necessity of altering the picture, concluded with such phrases as, "You paint nothing, and know nothing about it," or, "I do wish you would work, so that I could feel some satisfaction in talking of things with you." From time to time he would sit down, and scratch a few lines on the margin of a newspaper, after which his restless, pre-occupied walk again commenced.

So passed away the evening. Montenotte played a game of cards with his mother, sought in a portfolio for a sketch he found at last, wandered about the house in search of nothing, smoked two cigars, commenced a letter he was too idle to finish, wondered why he had done so little since dinner, and went to bed, unconsciously humming the air of *Miss Valettas'* Cretan song.

He appeared at breakfast next morning not more than an hour late. A glance at the paper,

a visit to the kennel, and a certain number of cigars, occupied him till nearly one. Then two notes were penned, excuses for not keeping his engagements, one of which implied an introduction for which a hundred men he knew would have wisely given a month's work. The notes despatched, and another cigar finished, he strolled into the studio to see what his father was doing.

Mr. Montenotte, who had been busy since eight, was considering some studies of the old slave, and the slave girl in love with her master. "What an amount of work and consideration the governor does put into his pictures," thought Montenotte, without saying anything. His own "Farewell" stood on the easel where he had placed it for Miss Valettas to see. He stopped now to look at it again, to think, "I'll make up my mind to-day whether I will finish that or not."

"Did you show Mr. Sarleigh's friend that?" asked his father, looking round.

"Yes."

"Why don't you finish it?"

"I was thinking I would make up my mind whether I would or not."

"I wish you would, Hugh," said the old man, emphatically. He left his careful studies, and, with his pencil in his hand, came to his son's side. The young man was scrutinizing his own work. Many months had passed since he had touched it, many idle months. He had left it because he felt no more interest in it. It stood on the easel, whilst re-commencement of work was postponed from day to day, and from week to week, till the easel happening to be wanted, the picture was taken off it, and leant with its face against the wall, and then ultimately pushed aside and forgotten. Now that he saw it again, two things struck him. There was more power in the picture than he imagined, and it was full of faults. Of what had he been thinking when he drew those outlines, imagined these colours, perpetrated the weak, exaggerated, expression of the faces.

"By Jove, this is a daub!" he said, aloud, and added, in thought, "And she admired it."

"It is not so bad, Hugh," said his father, "if you would alter this and that." The old man entered on a long category of criticisms and suggestions. His son listened. What impressed him was not the amount of fault found with

his picture, but how glaringly needful the alterations were, how unaccountably strange it was he had made and not noticed so many blunders.

"Worse things than this have been exhibited and got their share of success. You are right enough to condemn it, Hugh, but it is the best thing you have painted," said his father.

Montenotte thought of Miss Valettas, looked incredulous, and asked,

"Better than the pigs and chickens?"

"Go and look at them carefully."

He did so. At the end of half an hour he sent for the man-servant to take the picture from the wall. When he returned to the studio he told his father what he had done.

"Might as well have left it. It pleased your mother to see it," said the old man.

The younger artist was more astonished than he cared to confess at the change in himself of which he had suddenly become aware. Nearly two years of idleness had been spent in effecting it, only he knew not at the time that they were exercising any influence over him. Dawdling about town, wasting money abroad, meeting men and women, hearing them talk nonsense, seeing how silly they looked the

while, sauntering in the country with a sketch-book, and never making a sketch, nibbling at great authors, and never reading any book through, languidly trifling time away, he had slipped unconsciously into a habit of at first cynical, and afterwards keenly interested observation, and become a discerner of men and things. Every trifler is not wasting his time.

Now, when an accident had suddenly revealed to him the possession of augmented powers, he felt tempted to prove them, and to create in the strength of his wider, freer, deeper conceptions. At dinner-time he said,

“I have made up my mind, father, to finish that picture for the Academy.”

“You’ll have to work.”

Two days he did work, and made in those days three discoveries, very obvious ones. That work is irksome to an idle man, that fingers out of practice are clumsy tools, and that ability to express does not wait on power to perceive. Discouraged by these contretemps, the third day he did less, the fourth scarcely anything. On the fifth day he had relapsed into doubts of his own abilities, and other en-

gagements happening to occupy his time, a luncheon with his mother at the home of the fair Rosa, and an afternoon's shopping, the picture remained untouched. So artistic talent, if ignorant of itself, is inevitably crushed by the ruthless trivialities of life. Ere long his father expostulated, and named the number of days on which nothing had been done. Montenotte only replied indifferently that he probably should not finish the picture.

"Why not? It was getting on very well."

"You are always kind and encouraging, father, but, I fear, a very partial judge of my work."

"Then ask some one else. When Taylor was here the other day, you heard what he said. It was more pointedly encouraging than anything I have told you. You don't think him prejudiced in your favour?"

"No: yet I don't feel satisfied I shall paint anything worth painting. I had far better be doing something else, only what I don't know. I daresay I am making a fool of myself, but, I mean what I say. I don't mind work, and I don't mind waiting, but——"

"You want to be sure of success."

"No, not that either. I wish to be sure I have talent. Look here, father: a man has one advantage over a plant, he has a kind of choice of his circumstances. One thing is a rose, another a weed, merely as it may happen to be. There is no justice or injustice about that, there cannot be. So one man has talent, another is an ass. What we happen to be makes us. Education goes for something, if you happen to have the chance of it, and the cast of mind to profit by it, circumstances for more. But all only amounts to your being what you happen to be. One man is the human rose, another the human weed. Now if I, being a weed, and having a chance of remaining under the hedge, and so becoming good food for stray donkeys, choose to plant myself in a rose-garden, under the false impression I can do myself credit there, I shall be rooted out, and justly, though no more justly than if somebody else had planted me there instead of myself. Or, putting figures aside, have I much talent or little? Everybody has some who is not an idiot, and he who has most has only more than some one else. But if I, having a little, attempt what needs much, I

only make a mess, and leave undone the good I might have effected."

"Conceded."

"Then, father, what is to be done? If I can paint good pictures, I'll paint."

"Hugh, you overlook one thing. There are people pleased to see, and, better still, others who buy daubs, so there must be people to paint daubs. Perhaps that is your vocation."

"Then I say I don't care for my vocation."

"You can't say that on your own hypothesis. Weeds don't concern themselves about their vocation, they fulfil it."

"Ah, well! the simile is not perfect, of course. But you understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly. That, if you could foresee all the results of your actions, you would feel more certain about your projects. Most people agree with you, only, unfortunately, we cannot foresee the results of actions. Not a very new discovery. You paint, and let philosophising go to the devil."

The same day it happened that, rummaging about in his portfolios, the old artist found his son's sketch of Bourbachokátzouli. Montenotte, not usually very tidy, after the original

had disappointed him, had put the sketch away without thought, missed it, searched for it in vain, and given it up, with a faint regret, for lost.

"Hugh," said the old man, "is this yours?"

"Yes," replied the son, secretly vexed that his father had found it.

"When did you draw it?"

"Some days ago. It is Sarleigh's friend, Miss Valettas. You see the name."

"A very fine face, a very fine face. You could draw, if you chose. Do you want it?"

"No."

This, considering he would gladly have given five pounds for his father not to have seen it, was scarcely true. Mr. Montenotte took the sketch, and, with four drawing-pins, fastened it up on one of the screens. He said he wished he had seen Miss Valettas, and inquired why she had not remained to dinner. The sketch remained on the screen. In the afternoon, when alone in the studio, Montenotte stood for a long time looking at it. The great, reproachful eyes seemed to plead with him. He thought now he had been unjust in so soon condemning as common-place a woman with such a face. Her

signature below the little sketch had a charm for him too, for his eyes rested long on the hastily scribbled name. He turned away, whistling the opening bars of *Πέ μου νά ζήσης Πέρδικα*, and the next day worked steadily at his picture.

CHAPTER X.

THE morning after his visit with Miss Valettas at Chiswick, Sarleigh received a letter from home, a characteristic epistle, written by his sister Lilian, and a choice specimen withal of that young lady's mode of thinking and expressing herself.

"FRED,

"I know you think Alice cannot do wrong, in which you are mistaken. It follows that you will think this letter ill-natured, about which I do not care.

"Alice has been making a fool of herself with George Austen. How long this has been going on I do not know, though it cannot have begun long before I noticed it. I first saw a change in Alice's manner ten days ago. I do not know

how far their fooling has advanced, whether they are only beginning 'to fall in love,' or have 'fallen in love,' or 'are engaged,' nor, in short, what stage of idiocy they have by this time arrived at. Alice has become a little more mawkish than usual. The effect the affair has on Mr. Austen I have no opportunity of judging. He is always meeting Alice, and comes here oftener than he has any occasion to do. I should tell mother, only I think she will take Alice's part against me: and I should tell Ethel, only she would be sure to think it Alice's duty to fall in love, like she does herself, poor little fool! I have written to tell you, not because I want to hear anything from you about it, but because I am sure Alice wishes it to be a secret, and is silly enough, no doubt, to believe no one suspects anything of the sort.

"Ethel read us your letter about that young woman who came to you for help. I suppose you have by this time found out that she is another impostor. If not, you have, doubtless, still something to learn.

"Your sister,

"LILLIAN SARLEIGH."

When the deacon had perused this pleasant letter, he tore it in pieces and threw it into the fire. He knew George Austen, and liked him. Had he believed the news the letter contained, he might have felt interested. But, regarding it only as another exhibition of Lilian's crabbed temper and love of causing annoyances, he banished its tidings from his thoughts as unceremoniously as he had consigned its pages to the flames.

Another letter had come with it, which he took after breakfast to Miss Valettas. The direction made her smile. She opened the letter and read it, the deacon meanwhile closely watching her. Curiosity, pleasure, pain rapidly succeeded each other in her face. The letter read, she hastily glanced over it again, and then said,

"Your sister is kind. I should like to see her. She has written me such a pleasant letter."

"Why did you look so pained, then, when you had finished it?"

"Read it."

He read the letter, and returned it, saying,

"I am glad she has written like this, it is

just what I should have wished. But why did you look pained?"

"I did not know I was being watched. May I answer this letter? You will not mind my writing to your sister?"

He said "No," and added that he was sure his sister would be hoping for a reply, but he wondered why she should have asked. Having neither pen nor paper in her own apartments, she wrote in Sarleigh's rooms. The letter took long to compose, and the curate, not ignorant that letters written phrase by phrase are generally guarded ones, watched its progress with curiosity, whilst he pretended to be making extracts from a book. He had a faint hope she would offer it to him to read before sending it, which she might have done if she had for an instant suspected that any such ridiculous notion could enter his brain. Had she done so, he meant to say something flattering about friend's confidence in one another, which compliment (owing to her not showing him her letter) she luckily escaped. When it was finished, folded, and directed, she amused herself by holding the envelope cornerwise between her first fingers, and making it spin.

Sarleigh looked up from his notes.

"You have finished your letter," he said.
"Shall I send it to the post for you?"

"Thanks, but I am afraid it is not quite ready for the post yet."

"You have no stamps."

"That is it, mon ami, only that is not all. I have no money to buy stamps."

She said this with perfect unconcern, and continued to play with the letter, balancing it on the end of her finger, and spinning it on the table. This was an opportunity for which the good-natured deacon had been waiting.

"Miss Valettas," he said, "in the first place, here is a stamp, and, may I offer you another ten pounds?"

He took two five-pound notes from a drawer, and now put them down before her. She was sticking on the envelope the stamp he had just given her, and looked up surprised.

"You are very generous, but indeed I do not like to take them."

"I wish you would be frank with me. I want to be your friend," he said, nervously, "and you won't let me." She began playing with the letter again. "I wish you would tell me what

you want, what things of yours are still pawned, and what money you ought to have to spend till you get something to do. And I wish you would let me tell you what I want to do for you."

"You are very kind, I am sure."

"But you won't let me be as kind as I should like to be."

As he spoke he put his hand very gently on her shoulder. She had been leaning over her letter, and now drew herself up slowly, so that he was obliged to take his hand away again. Without looking at him, she said,

"Really, Mr. Sarleigh, I don't know what to do. You are kind, but I don't like taking money from you in this way. It is not right that you should pay for my things being redeemed, and yet I hate their being where they are. I wish I could begin earning something."

"I have put by a certain sum which I mean you to have if you want it. I can well afford it: and it will be a pleasure to me to think I have had the privilege of helping you out of your troubles."

"And I know, Mr. Sarleigh, that I am seeming to behave most ungraciously about taking

what you offer. But, as I must return it, you can see I have reasons for not wishing to make the sum a large one."

Though borrowing money from him certainly represented the very uttermost length to which any gentlewoman could wisely venture, it seemed to Sarleigh, who had begun to accredit her with all manner of virtues, very magnanimous of her to think of returning the money at all. It set him considering whether he could not augment the sum he had already destined for her service. He said,

"Between friends, Miss Valettas, there should surely be no hesitation about helping and being helped."

"But I cannot help you in any way. If I could I would gladly indeed, and that would alter the case. But you know I cannot."

"If I had said, the first night you came here, I could only assist those who would in return do something for me, would you not have thought it very cruel?"

"Mr. Sarleigh, I do not like your spending so much money on me."

It was a wonder he did not reply, "Only what will you do now, if I will not give you

any more?" He had it on his lips, and he seldom saw the unfitness of an inopportune speech before he had uttered it. This time he by chance left the awkward words unsaid, and instead proposed a definite sum she should accept, and could return when she pleased.

"It is very fine for me to talk of borrowing and paying," she answered, "but I am sure I do not know how I shall ever manage to repay you so much. Still, remember it is a loan, and I will repay it as I can."

"It is a small matter between friends," he said, giving her the money gaily, or, rather, as much as she would accept, for she steadily refused to have the whole sum her pretty refusals had enticed him to offer. She received the notes from his hand, saying only, "Thanks," without raising her eyes, and put them uncounted into her purse.

The deacon felt very much as if she was conferring, and he receiving, a benefit. He was disappointed at the briefness of her thanks, and still more that none of his sentiments concerning the indifference of such actions between friends found any echo from her lips. Perhaps she read him better than he read himself, for

certainly, when she was gone to post her letter, he did think that, if it was her intention to impose on him, her delicacy about taking, and honourable insistence on returning the money, had resulted in her having obtained more than she could have got by any other artifice.

Sarleigh was right in conjecturing that his sister would like to receive an answer to her letter. When it arrived, she was not at home, and it was left for her on the hall table. Whilst it lay there, Lilian came in, and in an instant noticed it. She hastily took it up, and turned it over once or twice.

"Fred's paper, London, S.E. A strange handwriting, looks like a woman's. Fred's stray lady, I expect. Has Alice written to her? I'll see."

She went into Alice's room, and from her writing-table took a little box, used to contain postage-stamps. Counting its contents, she found only four stamps. Two days before it contained five. "Now," she thought, "if mamma has not borrowed a stamp from her, Alice has written a letter. I never heard of it, so it

was written on the sly." She next took Alice's blotting-book, and, opening it, began turning over the leaves, and holding them up against the light, looking through them, examining first one side, and then the other, scanning them sideways, and from corner to corner, and upside-down. In the course of her studies of blotted writing, she deciphered, "Poor Lilian, to judge by her temper, is not very well," a fragment of a letter written to Sarleigh, at which she turned very red; but the search for any token of a letter to Miss Valettas was fruitless, and after a time she relinquished it. Each thing having been scrupulously restored to its place, she left the room, and again went out.

Ten minutes afterwards, Alice came home. Ethel, who was with her, had stopped at the gate to finish a flirtation, and her sister, on coming into the hall, seeing her letter on the table, took it up eagerly, congratulating herself on the circumstances which had led to her securing it unobserved. Till Ethel came in, she waited in the hall. Then she went to her room, and, the door being locked, broke the seal of the longed-for letter.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I do not know how to thank you for your letter. I wish I could see you, and tell you how I was touched by your kindness. If we were to meet, I should find, I fear, that my words might fail me like my pen.

"Mr. Sarleigh has done more than help me. He saved me when everything had come to the worst. You, who have such a kind heart, will be pleased to know how good your brother has been to me.

"I hope we may some day meet, not only that I may try to thank you, but that I may have the pleasure of knowing you. If not, and I cannot tell what I am going to do, I shall never forget the first Englishwoman who offered me her friendship.

"Your affectionate friend,

"BOURBACHOKATZOULI VALETTAS."

Alice read it twice, and said to herself, "Somehow that is a strange letter. It is very nice though, and very pretty. I suppose she cannot write English easily. 'You who have such a kind heart will be pleased to know how good your brother has been to me,' is like a

sentence out of a French exercise book. Poor thing ! it is a shame to criticise her. What a nice hand she writes.—B o u r b a c h o k a something, l g, no, t g, no, z y o u l i. What a name ! Bour-ba-cho-ka—h'm, Bour-ba—— I shall never read that. 'Valettas,' that is pretty. I should like to see her. I wish she had told me something about herself. I suppose I ought to have written her a longer letter ; hers is longer than mine. I must write to her again some day. I should like to keep this, but I suppose I had better not. If I do, Lilian will be sure to find it. Bourb—no, I shall never read that, nor remember it. B. Valettas. I must try to remember B. Valettas."

She read the letter once more, and then tore it into very small pieces, which she threw into a waste paper basket. After that she began dressing for dinner. At dinner-time she naturally said nothing about the letter. Lilian concluded she meant to keep its arrival a secret, and now felt sure it came from her brother's protégée. After dinner she stole up to Alice's room and looked around her.

"Where has Alice hidden that letter ? Burnt it, I expect, for fear I should find it. Or secret-

ed it under lock and key for an everlasting sacred remembrance of the agonies of Fred's latest impostor. Still I may as well look. First, waste paper basket. What is this, a letter torn into very small pieces; a woman's hand; 'if not, and,' and the top of a t underneath. This is it, no doubt. What is thrown into a waste paper basket can't be a secret, and so there is no harm in my reading it. How small she has torn it! There, I think that is all. No, here's another piece."

Talking thus to herself in a low voice all the time, Lilian gathered the many little bits of paper out of the basket, and, satisfied that none remained, carried off the prize she had secured to her own room. There, on a sheet of paper, she began fitting the torn pieces together like a puzzle.

"Where is Lilian?" asked Mrs. Sarleigh, in the breakfast-room, when she became conscious of her lengthened absence.

"Shall I go and see, mamma?" asked Alice.

"No, Alice," said Ethel; "for goodness sake, now she is out of the way, let her be out of the way."

"You need not go, dear. I daresay

she will come back presently," said Mrs. Sarleigh.

With a little care the torn letter was reconstructed, and then Lilian read it. Her opinion of it differed from her sister's. "That," she said, "is a cunning letter. Alice has written her a lot of sentiment—'thank you for your letter'—'how I was touched by your kindness'—'your kind heart.' I wonder what rubbish Alice did write? Also, she has seen that Alice is a fool, and sent her in return a parcel of words. It is a clever letter though, and she must have taken pains in writing it. Not a syllable about herself. She knows better. An impostor, I'm sure, and not such a fool as some of them. I think I could like her if only she is not what they call 'pretty.' What a name! Something like Beelzebub, only a great deal longer. Valettas, Valettas. That man Rinaldi Fred helped turned out to be Jack Runnels, and this Miss Valettas, Walters, I expect. Beelzebubina Walters, my dearest, you are not such a fool as some people think you, nor half so clever as you suppose yourself. I may as well put these pieces back in Alice's waste paper basket."

The letter having again become a shapeless handful of scraps, returned to the basket, and Lilian to the breakfast-room.

Alice enjoyed the delusion of supposing her secret unknown for three days, during which time she indulged in some pleasant day-dreams concerning her new friend. Another much longer letter was projected, and then Lilian made use of her discoveries.

Small sums, shillings and sixpences, and larger silver coins, were constantly being missed at Grove House. Suspicion, of course, fell on the servants, and much unpleasantness was endured by everybody, upstairs and downstairs, in consequence. Finally Ethel, who had some very ill-natured suspicions, without saying anything marked a few small coins, and left them in tempting places. The coins having disappeared, she asked Lilian at the breakfast-table for change for half a sovereign. The change was given. Ethel turned it over, and said—

“Lily, you are a thief.”

“A thief! oh, yes,” replied Lilian, slightly colouring.

“Mamma, do you hear?” said Ethel.

"What, my dear?"

"It is Lily that steals the money."

Mrs. Sarleigh turned to question Lilian, who was trying to look as little guilty, and as entirely indifferent, as was possible.

"Oh, Ethel! what are you saying?" exclaimed Alice. .

"Lily steals the money. I marked some shillings and sixpences, and left them about in my room, and now Lily has given them me in change for the half-sovereign. I always thought Lily was the thief, and now I have proved it."

"You girls will be the death of me," groaned poor Mrs. Sarleigh; "how dare you, Lilian, rob Ethel, you wicked, disgraceful girl!"

"Ethel is allowed about five times as much as I," said Lilian, quickly, "and she is as mean as a miser. I see no more harm in my taking from her money she does not want, than in her taking from you money, to give her which you keep Alice and me short."

"What Ethel has I give her," replied Mrs. Sarleigh, angrily.

"Yes, and keep us short to do it."

"At any rate, she is not a thief, Miss Impudence."

"No. She is only a humbug."

"Oh, Lilian dear," said Alice, with tears in her eyes, putting her hand on her sister's arm, "don't speak to mamma so, and say, dear, you have not done this."

"Not done it! I have done it, if you mean taken money from Ethel and you and the mum when I wanted it."

"From me, too? Is it you that have been robbing me, too?" gasped her mother.

"I took what I wanted, Ethel has what she wants."

"At any rate, I get it honestly, and like a lady," retorted Ethel.

"Leave the room, Lilian, you wicked, undutiful child," said Mrs. Sarleigh.

"Why, I am no worse than the others."

"Yes, you are; you are a very wicked girl," answered the mother.

"Am I? I don't come mincing up to you, 'Mammy dear, mammy dear,' putting my arms round your neck, coaxing you, and then laugh at you when I get out of the room. And I don't have letters on the sly. And if I have taken money, all I have had is not as much as Alice has, nor half as much as you give Ethel."

"Who has been having letters on the sly?" asked Mrs. Sarleigh. "Not you, Ethel?"

"No, mamma, never."

Lilian whistled.

"Alice?"

"I had a letter a few days ago from Miss Valettas, the Greek lady Fred helped," said Alice, timidly.

"How came she to write to you?"

"I wrote to her, mamma, to tell her I felt sorry for her."

"So, Alice! See what an example you set your sisters. You girls will be the death of me. I wish your brother was at home. I can eat no more breakfast. Ethel love, I wish you would come upstairs with me."

"To play the hypocrite a little wee bit, there is no harm in that," said Lilian.

"Hold your tongue, miss," said her mother.

"All right, dear," replied this very dutiful daughter.

Ethel had drawn her mother's arm into her own, and now very kindly and very gracefully led the old lady to the door, across the hall, and upstairs to her own room. There she shook up the cushions in her mother's great arm-chair,

placed her comfortably in the midst of them, brought her her scent-bottle, and kissed and coaxed her into a better temper. It was no marvel her mother spoilt her. When the little witching figure bent over her so gracefully, when the pink lips so finely chiselled at the corners murmured coaxing things honeyed with smiles that displayed her milk-white teeth, when her pale grey eyes sparkled so brightly and melted so tenderly, the old lady could not help feeling more than justly partial to the little golden-haired fairy thing, always loving and gentle, always prompt to put her at her ease, and to show her a thousand attentions (which too many girls will not show their mothers at any price), and whom in addition to all it was a pleasant thing only to see.

"Shall you believe, mammy dearest," said Ethel, now kneeling before her, and pouting, "all the wicked, dreadful things that Lilian says of me?"

"Never, love. What beautiful hair you have!"

"You won't believe that I would laugh at you, mammy dear, ever?"

"Of course not, love. Your hair is finer than mine was, Ethel."

"I don't believe it, mamma. I wish I could. What else shall I do for you!"

Mrs. Sarleigh wanted her book. She had forgotten what it was called, what it was like, and where she had left it. It was not the first nor the second Ethel brought her, but it was ultimately found. She also wanted another handkerchief, and to have the footstool set straight, and more coals put on the fire. She wished, she said, Alice would learn to do that as quietly as Ethel. She had lost her spectacles, which she had on, and the spectacle-case, and her keys. She wished to have put near her her scent-bottle, her physic, and a clean glass to take it in. Also would Ethel fetch her letters from down-stairs. All these labours were accomplished, and some others which Ethel's knowledge of her mother's fancies and forgetfulness suggested.

Duly grateful, the poor old lady sighed, and said,

"I do wish, love, that Lilian and Alice were like you. As they never can be, it is useless to wish it."

"There, mammy dear, now you are comfortable, I'll put the blind so, and you can look out

of the window. Give me a kiss, mammy dear."

Leaving her mother to look out of the window, her favourite entertainment, Ethel went downstairs. Alice was still in the breakfast-room, in a low chair by the fire looking very despondent. Her handkerchief was in her hand, and the tear-marks on her cheeks showed she had been crying copiously.

"Don't cry, Allie dear," said Ethel, bending over her, as she had over her mother, and putting one hand on her shoulder, whilst she thought, "What a shabby dress this is Alice has on. I should not like to wear it." "Don't cry, dear. Lily always was a nasty, mean, unladylike little wretch."

"Oh! but, Ethel, she is our sister. How could she come to be a thief? And she let the servants be suspected. And, Ethel, she does not care a bit."

"Not a bit," echoed Ethel. "She has no more conscience than a crab."

"I'm sure I'd rather halve my allowance with her than she should be tempted to be so wicked and behave so shockingly. How is mamma?"

"She's all right, smothered in half a hundred

pillows, and engrossed in the men mending the road."

"Ethel, I am so sorry for Lilian. How can she have discovered I wrote to Miss Valettas."

"Opened your letter, most likely."

"She would not be so dishonourable."

"Dishonourable! A common thief!"

"Don't call her that, Ethel. But to think she should have done a thing for which we should have sent any of the servants away without a character. Only to think of it makes me feel quite ill."

"It makes me ill to think of all the money she has stolen from me," replied Ethel, mournfully. "No wonder I am always as poor as Job! Was Miss Valettas' letter a nice one?"

"Very."

"I wonder whether she is good-looking. I wish you would write and ask Fred."

Alice proposed that Ethel should rather write herself. But Ethel had no time, and Fred would not tell her things as he would tell Alice. Alice objected she too had little time to spare, and enumerated her many engagements. Whilst she did so Ethel drew a chair close to her, and taking particular care that her train

should lie in a graceful curve on the floor at her side, put one arm on the back of her sister's low chair, and sat listening with a mysterious air. As her bright, smiling eyes met her sister's, Alice thought what a pretty girl she was, what a pity she was not more gentle with poor wicked Lily. When a slight break occurred in the catalogue of Alice's duties, Ethel remarked, looking down,

"Yet you have had more time to spare lately, Alice."

"No, less, I think."

"I mean time to spend on something you never spent time on before."

Alice's heart beat quicker. Ethel took one of her hands and said, "Mr. Austen." Alice blushed crimson, and hung her head.

"I congratulate you, Alice. I've been in love one, two, three, four, oh, I don't know how many times, and I am two years younger than you. But you, dear old staid Alice, never till now, eh?" She bent down her dainty head and peered into her sister's blushing face.

"No," whispered Alice.

"Fancy! Well, you'll know a deal more at the end of it than you do now, and you'll never

have so many surprises and fresh feelings in any other love-affair."

The little coquette spoke with an air of life-long experience.

"I shall never have another, Ethel."

"Oh, yes, you will, though. I thought that the first time, the first three times. Now I know better. There is always another. Men are so stupid that you can't like them long."

"I mean to love him all my life."

"Ah, I daresay: that is always the way at first. I said that about Charley Howden. But you'll know all about it soon enough. You are as happy as a queen now, and anybody can see it. And you are right. Be happy whilst you can. Falling in love is only too charming, but falling out again—oh, dear!" and Ethel shook her head and looked at her own little feet very solemnly.

"You won't tell, Ethel?"

"Alice, I never tell about love-affairs. But Lily will find you out for certain, and then look out."

Alice sighed.

"May I congratulate you yet, Alice?"

"He has not proposed."

"Then I congratulate you with all my heart. Don't you let him come to that as long as you can help it. Being engaged is almost as bad as being married."

"Ethel!"

"Don't look shocked. I know more about it than you. When you have once said 'Yes,' the men begin to give themselves airs, to treat you as if you belonged to them, and to want you to be married. They get careless about their manners, and show you the seamy sides of their characters. Men are not half so nice as you think them before you really begin to know them."

Saying which, the small enchantress, after kissing her sister, got up from her seat and left the room. At the door she stopped a moment to look back and say,

"Make the most of it, Ally dear. The first time only comes once, and it is a very sad thing, but most people make a mess of it."

CHAPTER XI.

“ I DON’T wish to seem inquisitive,” said Mr. Couton, on his meeting his curate in the street a day or two after the visit to Chiswick, “ but is it true that you went out with our friend Miss Valettas last Thursday?”

The deacon explained his behaviour and motives, in neither of which his vicar appeared to take any interest. He only remarked that Sarleigh must judge for himself, and not be surprised if people talked.

And people did talk. The deacon and his protégée formed at present the staple of gossip all around St. Adhelm’s. Anyone who had been able to ascertain, or invent, something new about “ the curate and the Greek lady,” found a ready hearing in drawing-rooms and parlours. The facts, not, indeed, as they occurred, heaven

forbid any human life should be clouded by such want of imagination! nor yet artistically coloured, the animal *Femina vulgaris garrula* has not yet arrived at that, but, exaggerated into a mass of grotesque impossible fable, had long ago become what Mrs. Tansley called "basket news." Far more interesting than any facts, the apocryphal antecedents of Miss Valettas had been recently brought to light. As the various histories could not by any known process be made consistent, and were forgotten as soon as disseminated, they may be left unrecorded. On the other hand, whilst some minds were engaged on inventing Miss Valettas' previous career, others, more romantic, drew from their inner consciousness touching narratives of love-scenes between herself and her protector. That she and the curate were engaged, everybody was aware. Some knew when they were going to be married, but would not tell, an embroidered deceit that commanded instantaneous credence. For all these folks the visit to Chiswick was a confirmation of previous conjectures that made them reckless in asserting and believing anything that might be suggested. A medical man in the neighbourhood,

impressed with the idea of an unusual opportunity of testing the credulity of the human ape, brutally set a-going a lie of more than ordinary audacity. Miss Valettas' father, the son of Aiskulapios averred, had that morning appeared on the scene. He was a Greek millionaire, high in the favour of the Turkish authorities, and of almost gigantic stature. He rewarded the saviour of his daughter with her hand, a fabulous fortune, and his paternal benediction, the curate on his part vowing to turn Mahometan, and to marry two other wives contemporaneously with the fair Bourbachokátzouli. To the surgeon's great satisfaction his own story, certainly not without some hesitation about its accuracy, was repeated to him by a patient, before he had the next day completed his rounds, but the dose proved too strong for ordinary constitutions. A little knot of elderly spinsters shook their heads over the whole affair, and felt that it must, alas! come to a tragic conclusion. The lady would drown herself after all, and the curate turn Jesuit, he had always had Popish tendencies. Did they not know how drear the end of all true love and deep romance invariably is! Some two or three

ill-natured people, chiefly led by Mrs. Tansley's talk, believed Miss Valettas an impostor and Sarleigh a fool, but that they might yet get married before they found each other out.

One consequence of all this gossiping was Miss Valettas' removal to the Sisterhood sooner than was originally proposed. Mrs. Couton opined that whether Miss Valettas chose to throw herself away on Mr. Sarleigh or not, partly for his sake, and partly for hers, and partly for the sake of the church, it was desirable to put an end to the frequent visits the young people paid each other, and the pointed remarks their behaviour evoked. So, some preliminary arrangements with the Mother Superior having been made, she took Miss Valettas to call at the convent.

The Sisterhood in the parish of Saint Adhelm shall not be here, as usually, denoted by the name of its Patron Saint, out of deference to Mrs. Couton's opinion, probably a correct one, that the Saint, in her time a remarkable woman, and since, acquainted with a good many facts, of which she had no suspicion before she went to Heaven, is ashamed to be supposed to have any connection with the place. It shall be

simply "The Sisterhood." "The Sisterhood" was founded by Mr. Couton's predecessor, a man who literally worked himself to death, in the more than herculean labour of trying to raise many base lives a little. His praises the Mother Superior, a thorn in the poor man's side whilst he lived, never wearied of sounding to his successor. The bounty of certain devotees had enabled the community to indulge, though not so much as they would have liked, in that penchant for building, which has signalised all religious bodies in all ages. In consequence, the Sisterhood, when Miss Valettas became acquainted with it, was composed of incongruous parts, representing to a philosophic mind three familiar states of life : making the worst of things, making the best of things, and pretending to think things different from what they are.

The first of these aspects of existence was aptly suggested by that part of the place which bordered on the street, consisting of three ordinary twelve-roomed houses connected by piercing the walls. In these poor houses, ordinary rooms, passages, and staircases, that might have been bright and inviting, were

rendered drearily wretched by the neglect of everything that makes the comfort of our homes. The floors, in some places imperfectly stained, were bare, except where a ragged present of old carpet or oil-cloth had not yet been trodden quite to dust. The walls, coloured with shabby, ill-assorted tints, were eloquent with dreariness, intensified by dusty "illuminated" texts and commands of "Silence" nailed up here and there with tacks, whose heads made a rusty stain on the paper. The windows were whitened to within a foot of the top. Rude and incongruous furniture, scanty in some rooms, crowded in others, arranged without regard to appearance, proclaimed a contempt for every amenity of life. Over all reigned a wilful naked ugliness calculated to lower a sensitive person's circulation.

This world of disagreeableness, a door, covered with faded green baize on the one side, and on the other studded with sham nail-heads, separated, from an entirely opposite phase of conventual life, the dramatic and fictitious phase. On the further side of the biform door a short flight of steps descended into a miniature cloister. The abrupt change resembled a

step back from the nineteenth into the thirteenth century. Delicate, Early-english columns with foliated capitals supported a light arcade enclosing a little square plot of green grass. Around the edge of the turf by the pillars grew sweet briars, and roses, and creeping flowers. The walls around the cloister were broken only by a few doors and narrow windows irregularly disposed, calculated picturesquely to vary the long flat length of stone wall. Tiles of quaint device paved the red and yellow floor, and above an open work of Spanish chestnut formed a roof in which the eye lost itself in shadows melting into gloom. In the cloister were the entrances to the chapel, the refectory, the common-room, and some galleries of cells.

Near the chapel door, a winding staircase in a tiny tower led to the Mother Superior's apartments, where the good lady emphatically made the best she could of her situation. Her sitting-room was of itself a little gothic chamber, in whose construction comfort had been deliberately sacrificed to architecture and antiquarian taste. But by means of modern contrivances, carpet, curtains, fire-irons, cushioned chairs, drawing-room tables, flowers in the window,

knick-knacks, and even Venetian blinds, the Superior had made of it a tolerable if not tasteful boudoir, better furnished than many small drawing-rooms. The room was untidy, and littered with paper like an office.

One thing was common to every part of the Sisterhood. A faint subdued shade, a tinge of something over everything, which suggested it might not be quite impossible to make the place cleaner.

Bourbachokátzouli's first interview with the Superior was not re-assuring. She and Mrs. Couton waited a considerable time, first in the convent parlour, and then in the little room at the top of the turret stairs, before the great lady deigned to be at leisure. On appearing, she shook hands with the vicar's wife and bowed condescendingly to Miss Valettas, who, having no seat offered her, placed herself where she could have the best opportunity of watching the Mother's face, and listened in silence to arrangements made for her residence among the Sisters without her own wishes being once consulted. At the end of the visit she made a pretty speech expressive of her sense of the Sisters' kindness and hospitality; "she hoped,"

she said, "she might soon get work, and so not long impose on their goodness."

The Mother fixed her motionless eyes on her whilst she spoke. She was a tall, thin, big-boned woman, with a narrow head, tightly-compressed lips, a thin nose, grey eyes, a sallow complexion, and a number of long wrinkles across her forehead. To judge by her face, she was about sixty. She sat with her long hands crossed on her lap, and with her head raised with an air of impertinent attention as long as Bourbachokátzouli spoke, and then, without making any reply, turned to Mrs. Couton, and said, "I think I need not detain you longer."

She rose herself first, and opened the door for the two ladies, to whom as they passed she bowed stiffly, saying "Good morning"—"good morning," in a monotone.

Miss Valettas understood plainly enough that she was about to be entertained at the Sisterhood, because the Mother either wished to oblige or feared to refuse Mrs. Couton. A pleasant prospect! Sarleigh invited her to spend the last evening of "her liberty," as she called it, with him. Though she declined this,

alleging as her excuse her packing, she consented to dine with him if he would have dinner a little earlier than usual. The deacon, delighted to have her company, got her a dainty little dinner, consisting of dishes he had ascertained she particularly liked; an attention Bourbachokátzouli was quite capable of appreciating.

"Mon ami," she asked, in the course of the meal, "what does 'respectable' mean?"

He thought at first, and thought it strange, too, that the English word was unknown to her. She soon disabused him of that mistake. What she wished to know was what made people respectable.

"Their conduct is such as people respect," quoth the cleric.

"Is my conduct respectable, then? Am I respectable?"

"Yes." He spoke with hesitation, for he fancied she was going to lead him into some trap, which she frequently did.

"You don't seem very sure of it. It was respectable to be wandering about the streets at night, without anyone to take care of me, and to pawn my things!"

"That was not quite respectable, perhaps."

"It was right. It was my duty to pay for my food and lodging, and I could do it in no other way. So, what is right is not always respectable, consequently, what is respectable cannot be always right."

"But how could anyone respect what is not right, Miss Valettas?"

"That is exactly what I want to know. I suspect it is because it is like what they would do themselves. Nobody is thought any the worse of for doing wrong, only for doing differently from other people. In this country, for instance, nobody is shocked at people being heretics, because you are all heretics. In Greece people who are not orthodox are thought little better than beasts. Respectable means like other people in a stupid way."

The curate entirely disapproved of the definition, and of the arguments on which it was grounded, and, above all, of the imputation of "heresy." Why should she think him a heretic?

"Of course I think you a heretic. I am a Roman Catholic."

"A Roman Catholic!"

Surely if she could have seen how many,

many brave dreams had vanished in a moment from the poor deacon's hopes, she would not have been startled at the emphasis of despondency with which he spoke. As it was, she only laughed at him, and asked,

"Did you not know that? What? I do believe it has made you quite pale. Is it such a dreadful thing in this country to be a Roman Catholic? I was brought up orthodox, but, after my father's death, I joined the Roman Church, to please my French friends."

"Does Mr. Couton know it?"

"Yes. One of the first things he asked me was what my religion was."

Sarleigh became distrait after this, and she soon left him, as she ought to have done long before; but the delicate attention to her tastes his dinner had betokened, had earned him the recompense of a longer stay than was promised, though it involved her being late at the Sisterhood. After her departure the deacon felt robbed of more than her company. He had never in his life been so lone as sometimes lately since he had known her, and now not only she but his hopes were fled. He could only sit and muse how far wiser he had been

never to have had any. Still he was occasionally to visit her at the convent, and she had said she should look forward to meeting him. There was some consolation in that.

It was about half-past eight in the evening when Bourbachokátzouli arrived at the Sisterhood. As soon as her luggage was deposited in the entrance-hall, and the door closed behind her, the Sister who admitted her, being the portress, as a great bunch of keys hanging at her girdle showed, said, in a slow monotone, without stops,

“The Mother has given orders, Miss Valettas, that you should be conducted at once to your room. She expected you more than an hour ago, but will not now be able to see you this evening. Outer Sisters and visitors breakfast in the common room to-morrow at eight. Sister Ann will show you your way.”

“You will send up my luggage soon, Sister, will you not?” replied Miss Valettas, who had no intention of feeling rebuked, or of letting the portress suspect her of any such weakness.

In reply the Sister only bowed, and Miss Valettas turned to follow Sister Ann. They went up a flight of stairs, along a narrow, badly-

lighted passage, then up another shorter flight, and round a corner into an empty room. Crossing this, they arrived at a low gothic doorway, across which hung a brown curtain, ornamented with a pattern of Fleur-de-lys. The Sister held aside the curtain, and Bourbachokátzouli, passing through, found herself in a long stone passage lighted by a single gas jet in the centre, and having a number of small doors on the right and left. A little lamp at the further end flickered before a Guardian Angel in a niche.

"Your room," said the Sister, opening a door about half-way down the passage.

"Wait a minute, Sister. I shall never know which it is if I do not count. One, two, three, —nine. Number nine. It is a pity you don't put numbers on the doors."

The Sister pointed to a saint's name painted on the door, and "Silence" in Gothic characters over the archway through which they had entered.

"Do you have much of that here?" asked Miss Valettas. But the Sister had turned away, and walked slowly towards the portal by which they had entered. Bourbachokátzouli looked at her dark figure passing down the narrow stone-

paved, stone-arched, dusky corridor, between the two rows of oaken doors, towards the low, curtained archway, and thought, "I wonder whether she knows how picturesque she looks, and whether she feels the air of quaint repose there is here." When the Sister had disappeared behind the curtain, she opened the door indicated to her, and entered the cell. A little pearl of blue light showed where the gas was. She turned it up, and looked around her.

The cell was very small, not more than six feet by ten. The whole of one side was occupied by a low bed, a rush-bottomed chair, and a small cupboard, the top of which served as a washing-stand. The head of the bed was towards the door, and, narrow as the bed was, it occupied half the breadth of the room, leaving only a small passage between itself and the opposite wall. In the corner, facing the door, stood a prie-dieu. A crucifix hung over it, and a card of convent regulations, which the new occupant of the cell did not concern herself to read. Above the crucifix was the gas-jet. Another crucifix was placed above the head of the bed. By the bedside was a small patch of carpet. The floor was tiled, the walls and roof

of brick, coloured a cold grey. Near the washing-stand, in a deep recess, was a little window. Miss Valettas opened it and looked out. Fronting her were the large windows of the lighted chapel. Thence she learnt that her room was in one of the galleries on the north side of the cloister. The night air was damp and chilly, and she was glad to close the window again.

Having taken off her cloak and hat (the former she hung on a peg behind the door, and threw the latter, with her gloves, upon the coarse coverlet of the bed), she sat on the chair and, with her elbow on the washing-stand, leaning her head on her hand, fell into a reverie. She had dressed herself carefully for dinner, not because she was to dine with the curate, but because she loved to be dressed, and now her fashionable clothes, and pretty laces, and tasteful, though simple, jewellery looked anomalous in the ugly, meanly-furnished cell. But not that, nor anything of that kind, occupied her thoughts as she sat gazing at the plaster crucifix. Rather, scenes of which the new surroundings reminded her: a great convent near Paris, and a little Greek maiden who could only manage a few words of French, and

was shy of trying to say even those, and a certain Sister Terese who taught the little Greek many things, and was dead now, and no doubt gone where Bourbachokátzouli Valettas did not seem very likely to go.

Some one knocked. Bourbachokátzouli rose from her reverie and opened the door. Two Sisters entered, carrying her portmanteau between them. One of them was a very pale, slight woman, who evidently severely felt the weight she was bearing.

"Oh, Sisters!" exclaimed their guest, "I am sorry you should have brought this up. It is so heavy! Let me help you." She took hold of one of the straps, and helped to carry the portmanteau into the cell.

Now occurred the difficult question where it should be put. There did not appear to be room for it anywhere except on the bed. Its owner thought of proposing the removal of the prie-dieu, but shrank from shocking the Sisters. So, saying if they left it she would manage somehow, she had the portmanteau deposited in the space between the bed and the wall, which it entirely blocked up. Assured by her that there was no occasion for immediately bringing

up her other luggage, the Sisters bade her good night and departed. She sat down again to deliberate what she should do with the portmanteau, and to wish the Mother had provided her with larger quarters. Ten minutes' reflection brought her no nearer any way out of the difficulty of putting four things where there was only room for three, so at last, the prie-dieu being laid upon the floor, and pushed under the bed, the portmanteau was put in its place. She unlocked it, and began getting out her things. For a minute or two there was a sound of many feet in the corridor, and an opening and shutting of doors. Then again all was still. Miss Valettas had paused in unpacking to listen if anyone came to her door. When all was once more quiet, she continued her task, the most difficult part of which was to find places in which to dispose her property. The small cupboard was not large enough for all she wanted it to hold. The solitary peg behind the door was already loaded, and the deep niche of the window full. Her jewel-case stood on the chair, and the washing-stand was crowded with brushes and combs, boxes and scent-bottles. She was standing wondering whether

the nail on which the crucifix hung was strong enough to bear the weight of a dress she held in her hand, when unexpectedly the gas burnt low, got pale, blue, flickered, and went out.

"That's nice," quoth Bourbachokátzouli. She felt for the jet, found it, and lighting a match, tried to re-kindle the gas. It was turned off. So, there being nothing else to be done, she began undressing in the dark.

Whilst she was so engaged, the door opened, and a Sister stepped in with a light in her hand. Not understanding that this was the functionary whose duty it was to see that everybody was in bed, Miss Valettas requested her to leave the light. But the Sister, with a severe look of reprehension, raised her finger to her lips, pointed silently to the bed, in which Bourbachokátzouli should have been before this, and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XII.

BOURBACHOKATZOULI was awaked in the morning by a noisy tinkling. Looking up, she perceived a Sister by her bedside, vigorously ringing over her a little brass hand-bell. As soon as she was aware that the sleeper was awake, the Sister left the bedside, and, going to the gas jet, lighted it, crossed herself, said the Invocation, and then, after bowing to the crucifix, went on to the next cell.

Miss Valettas wondered what time it might be, and got her watch. Alas! for many weeks lately she and that miniature gold watch had been parted, and she had fallen out of the habit of winding it before going to bed. In consequence, when, in the evening, the catastrophe of the gas happened, she entirely forgot her

watch. Now its motionless hands pointed to twenty-five minutes to four. Its owner had some hazy notion that it was still dark, that she did not know what nocturnal devotion the Sister might have been performing, and that it would be very absurd to get up in the middle of the night in a strange house, and so, though the bed was not very soft, being young, she soon fell asleep again, mixing her thoughts with the beginnings of her dreams.

Her slumbers were broken the second time by the clanging of a much larger bell. She had no notion whether she had slept a couple of hours or ten minutes. But a pale gleam of light stealing through the narrow window told that day was coming. After some deliberation, not wishing to be guilty of the rudeness of inconveniencing those who entertained her, she rose and dressed. There was no glass in the cell, and she was compelled to dress her hair as best she could with her hand-glass. This took a long time, and another bell was swinging noisily before her toilet was finished. On leaving her cell, she wandered some time through long passages, in which there was not anyone to be seen of whom she could ask her way, till

she at last found a staircase, and at its bottom the portress, of whom she inquired the time, and where she should go for breakfast. This information received, she found her way to the common room, and entered it.

Some dozen ladies, dressed much like Sisters, were sitting at a long table making their breakfast off bread and treacle and coffee. A Sister stood at the head of the table, with her eyes cast down, and her joined hands hanging before her. A large coffee-pot was on the table in front of her, but no cups and saucers. The ladies conversed in twos and threes in an undertone. After a minute's hesitation, Miss Valettas walked up to the Sister, and said, "Good morning, Sister, I fear I am late."

"Good morning," replied the Sister; "will you sit there?"

She pointed to a place, to which Miss Valettas went. The religious followed, poured coffee and milk into the cup, and offered her bread. Then she returned to her station at the head of the table.

The lady nearest Miss Valettas pushed towards her a basin containing treacle, on the surface of which floated many crumbs and small

morsels of bread. No spoon being visible with which to get out any of the not very tempting-looking sweet-stuff, Bourbachokátzouli declined it. But before long she saw not without surprise how ladies treacle their bread at a Sisterhood. First one, and then several others, dipped their bread into the treacle-basin, dexterously whipping it out and twisting it round to prevent the sticky liquid trickling off. The basin went from one to another, up and down the table, and acquired at each dip a few additional crumbs.

Bourbachokátzouli was conscious of being distinctly ill at ease. The great bare room, one monotonous brown all over, from the dusky cocoa-nut matting on the floor, to the very smoky ceiling, curtainless, fireless, with no ornament save the great crucifix over the empty hearth, was depressing in the extreme; depressing, too, the staring windows whitened over with paint, and the dusky chimney-piece, on which stood a penny ink-bottle and two faded photographs of former chaplains: most depressing of all, the silent, patient, serving Sister standing motionless at the head of the table. Miss Valettas longed to say to her,

"Come and sit by me, Sister, and tell me how long you have been here, and how you like it." The murmured conversations of the little knots of ladies round the table continued incessantly. Whether she should speak to them, or wait till they spoke to her, Miss Valettas did not know. Before her breakfast was half finished, a Sister entered and said, "The Mother wishes to see Miss Valettas."

Bourbachokátzouli rose, leaving her meal unfinished, and not very sorry to get away.

"That's Miss Valettas, the person they say the curate is going to marry," said one of the ladies, looking up.

"Is it? I wish I had looked at her more particularly," replied the lady addressed.

"Who is it?" asked a third.

"Miss Valettas," said the first speaker. "Did you notice that she never said grace, neither before nor after her breakfast?"

"I noticed, I noticed."

"So did I," said another; "she was not in chapel this morning."

"No. I heard she was here, and looked for her. Do you see how ridiculously she dresses?"

"Positively absurd, here too!"

"And never to say grace, shocking! I was told she was good-looking."

"You see what she is. A got-up French-woman. Very common, I call her, and looks like—well, never mind."

Whilst the ladies thus criticized her, her guide conducted Miss Valettas to the Mother's room. When she entered the Superior was seated at her table, with a paper in her hands, giving orders for the day to a Sister standing near. Bourbachokátzouli stood waiting. The Sister being dismissed, the Mother, after a minute or two spent on a final glance at her paper of arrangements, looked up. Miss Valettas bowed, and wished her good morning.

"Good morning," replied the Mother, without rising or offering her a seat, "I wished to speak to you as soon as you came, but you were so late last night that I had no time. You found everything ready, I hope?"

"Everything, thank you, except a looking-glass."

"Ah! I will speak about it. I wish you to understand your position here. I cannot treat you as one of our visitors, but I promised Mrs. Couton to make a difference between you

and other pensioners." She paused awhile to allow these words to fix themselves on her hearer's memory, and then continued, "I must request you, whilst here, to conform to our regulations. Our time-table, in which you will find the hours of the meals, and so forth, is in your cell, and in the common room. I daresay you have already examined it, if not, you will oblige me by doing so at once. It is not usual for anyone to leave the premises without my knowledge. I think I must ask you not to put on any jewellery whilst you are with me, it is never worn in the Sisterhood, and might cause jealousy, even covetousness. That thing, which I think is meant to fasten up the train of your dress, you will be able to dispense with, if you will, please, wear a dress without a train. Dresses with trains are not allowed here. If you will ask the portress, she will tell you where you can get a cap such as is worn here, and will tell you how to attire yourself generally more suitably. I have no time for these trifles."

She paused again. Miss Valettas only bowed. Seeing she was not about to reply, the Superior proceeded.

"I think Mrs. Couton said something about your proposing to take a governess's situation. You may have perhaps had some experience in teaching. If so, I shall not object to your assisting the Sisters in the schools, or, if you prefer it, in the work-room, of course under the guidance of one of themselves. I trust, at least, that you will not be idling about the place. I am always happy to assist with my counsel those in my house. If you wish at any time to see me, tell the portress, who will ascertain for you at what time I am at liberty, and will always give you any information you may need. I hope that, though your stay among us may be but for a short time, you may hereafter be able to look back on it as a profitable time, in the highest sense. Good morning."

Saying this, she bowed to her guest, still without rising, and pointed with her hand to the door. Bourbachokátzouli's patience had been rapidly ebbing since the beginning of the Mother's harangue. The kinder tone of the last sentence appeased her a little, but she was so disgusted at the Superior neither rising nor offering her a seat that she returned her bow with a tiny inclination of the most distant

hauteur, and turned away without a word.

"Sadly wanting in humility," muttered the religious, as she watched her walk across the room, "and a beggar, and a vagabond!"

The vagabond consulted the time-table, an epitome of the thousand petty tyrannies of a convent. She learnt that people got up and went to chapel at some hour suggestive to her of nothing but returning from a ball. Breakfast at eight. (N.B.—Outer Sisters and visitors will take meals in the common room.) Dinner at half-past twelve. Tea at five. Supper at half-past seven. The community retire at a quarter-past nine. The gas is turned out at a quarter to ten. SPEAKING IS PERMITTED from eight till half-past nine a.m., from one till two p.m., and from half-past seven till a quarter past eight p.m. EXCEPT— Here ensued a catalogue of some twenty different times and places at each of which talking was forbidden to all, or to particular members of the community. These minor details Bourbachokát-zouli made no attempt to understand.

Also, though she went to her cell, and took off her earrings and her dress-holder, she made no inquiry for the Sister who was to lend her

a cap, and show her how to attire herself.

She did ask whether she could be of any use to the Sisters in the schools, and was referred to one of them, who immediately mentioned a cap and a dress without a train as necessary qualifications for permission to assist in any way. For a few minutes, during which the Sister waited with evident impatience, Miss Valettas hesitated. She had no dresses without trains, and she did not wish to wear one of the Sisters' hideous caps. But ultimately the wish to please mastered other feelings, and, promising to alter one of her dresses in the course of the day, if she might for the present teach in the one she had on, she consented to tie up her head in a kind of night-cap, with a bow under her chin as big as a nigger-singer's cravat, and followed the Sister to the classrooms.

Her attempts to aid in the Sisterhood schools, which shall be recorded at once, extended over three days. She first tried a French class of day boarders in a class-room. Twenty-three girls, of whom about five or six might make a claim to pass for young ladies, formed a class, whose knowledge of French was of the sort

acquired by a weekly allowance of three ill-prepared lessons, each three quarters of an hour in length. Bourbachokátzouli spoke to them in French, and they could not understand a word. They read French to her, and she could not understand a word. At the end of ten minutes, giggling and whispering commenced amongst the more impudent girls, and before half an hour had elapsed a bright, saucy lass of sixteen let a pile of twenty-three slates go down on the ground with a prolonged smash, and then, clasping her hands, exclaimed, "Oh, que c'est épouvantable!" in the same tone in which Miss Valettas had applied some similar expression to her French exercise. The whole room burst into a roar of laughter, which was purposely prolonged till a Sister appeared and demanded the cause. Miss Valettas, who enjoyed the joke as much as anyone, said the girls were unruly, but refused to name the culprit. The remainder of the French lesson was excused, and the girls were marched off.

As they were leaving the room the offender turned back, and, coming up to Miss Valettas, held out her hand, saying,

"I hate French, but I like you, and, if you

are going to teach us, I'll not plague you again. I'm sorry now."

"Never mind, dear. Go with the others, or the Sister may suspect you, and you will get into trouble."

"As if I cared for *her*! Are you going to teach us?"

"I am afraid after this they won't let me."

"Won't they? Then they shall see how I'll behave to the other teacher."

Saying which, this promising young lady walked herself off, singing, whilst eyeing the Sister standing at the door,

"The Sister kissed the baker's boy
That used to bring the bread,
For penance she was made to kiss
A clergyman instead."

Bourbachokátzouli's next essay was with four little mortals, whose spelling was said to be bad. At a table in one corner of the great school-room, at the expense of an immense amount of labour, and a whole large bottle of ink (they upset it three times), they wrote down, from dictation, word by word, the following specimens of English:

"Our five sencees, which are those of hering,

smel, tast, and tutch, are preshus givst for which we cannot be greatful enough. But we should not trust to these alone for all that we recure to now."

"Our five sences, which are those of sight, hering, smill, tase, and tough, are preshgief for which we cannt be greatful. But we should trush to these alone for all regyure."

"Our five sences, which are those of site, hearen, smell, tace, tast, and thuch, are preshes gives for which we can not be grateful. But we should not trust to thees alone for all that we require to now."

"Our five sences, which are those of the sight, hearing, shell, stace, and tuch, are preses gifes for which we cannon be greatful he nofth. But we should trush to these alone for all thaht we requir to no."

Before she had got to the end of these beautiful manuscripts, Miss Valettas hid her face in her handkerchief, and smothered her laughter as well as she could. The four little girls stood before her staring with great open eyes. Two of them put their thumbs in their mouths, and one began to cry.

She next superintended some music lessons.

She had but one girl with her at a time, and got on capitally till one of her pupils told the usual music mistress that "Miss Valettas knew a precious sight more about music than anybody else they had ever had to teach them." Whereupon the indignant "professoress" went directly to the Superior, and told her that if "this Frenchwoman" was ever again allowed to interfere with the music pupils, she would leave on the spot, though she should forfeit three months' salary. So Miss Valettas gave no more music lessons.

"I should like to be of a little use," she said, despondently, to the Sister who brought her word the Mother did not wish her to teach music any more, "perhaps I could help in looking over exercises."

A great heap of copy-books was sent to her in the community-room, and she worked hard at correcting French exercises and English "themes." But she found too much fault, and put into the French exercises things about which the girls would ask questions the teachers could not answer. And so the community at the end of three days came finally to the conclusion that she had better have no more to do with the schools.

To kill time she tried the work-room. One day of that was enough. The stitch, stitch, stitch, in appalling silence, made her want to scream. She knew nothing of the fine ecclesiastical embroidery on which the more skilful needlewomen of the Sisterhood were employed, and the coarse work given her made her fingers sore and weary. Stooping nearly broke her back, and watching the needle fatigued her eyes. After this she determined, in spite of the Mother's caution to the contrary, to idle about the place rather than to go through any further ordeals, and to get rid of the time in any way fortune vouchsafed to put in her way.

It must not be imagined that this was all that occurred during her first four days in the convent. On the first day, as she was going to dinner, a little late, she met in the corridor a Sister of some sort looking excessively cross. This personage was not dressed in full costume, but wore only one of the Sister's caps, and a cloak over ordinary, though shabby, black clothes. Miss Valettas eyed her as she passed, and the girl, for she was no more, turned and said, sharply,

"You'd better make haste, if you want your dinner, or you'll get none either."

Talking was forbidden in the corridors, and Bourbachokátzouli was surprised at being addressed. The apparent allusion to the Sister and herself going without dinner she did not understand.

"Are *you* not going to have any dinner, Sister?" she asked.

"No. And I'm not a Sister. I'm only a Postulant, you must not call me Sister. My name is Caroline. I've just smashed a tumbler, so I'm not to have any dinner."

"Is that a rule here?"

"Didn't you know it? Are you not one of the outer Sisters?"

"No. I'm—Miss Valettas," (having been told she was something between a visitor and a pensioner she was rather at a loss how to describe herself). "Ought we to be talking?"

"Oh, no. But I don't mind. I'm to have no dinner, and I'm awfully hungry. They can't do anything more to me if I do talk. There's no lock-me-up here. They say they have lock-me-ups in some Sisterhoods. They wouldn't lock me up twice, I know."

"If you are hungry, Caroline, I have some biscuits upstairs in my cell. Would you like to have them?"

"Shouldn't I just. I've been at work in the parish all the morning, and I'm famishing. But I'm afraid you'll lose your own dinner."

"If I do, I'll come and help you to eat the biscuits."

Saying this she ran upstairs and brought down two great handfuls of biscuits to the hungry postulant. As the girl took them Miss Valettas noticed that the sleeves of her dress were wet.

"Why," she said, "your sleeves are wet, and your skirts too."

"Wet! I should rather think they were wet! I'm wet all over, wet to the bones! Didn't you know it's been raining like Noah's deluge?"

"But won't you go and change these things?"

"Change my things! Where *do* you come from? Don't you know nobody changes things here? If you come in wet, you stay wet, and, what's more, we're not allowed umbrellas."

"But you are soaking."

"I can't help that. The rule is, if you are soaking, soak. Things are not to be changed, wet nor dry, summer nor winter. In the summer the what-do-you-call-it habit is too warm, and in the winter not warm enough. But it's always a mortification, and that's the main point here. You'd better go and get your dinner, if you want any."

Bourbachokátzouli took the advice. As soon as she was seated, a Sister came to her and whispered (for some one was reading aloud from a devotional book),

"It is a rule in the Sisterhood, Miss Valettas, that those who are not in their places before grace is said lose their meal. Of course you did not know this, but please do not be late another time."

Miss Valettas mentally determined, the first time she was outside the walls of the Sisterhood, to become the proprietress of a private store of provisions.

Dinner being over, during which nobody spoke, she bethought herself of the cloisters as a pleasant place for a stroll on a wet afternoon. As she was walking up and down, enjoying the quiet, and wondering what had

become of everyone else, the Sister who had the night before helped to bring up her portmanteau passed her, bearing a large zinc bucket of hot water and some ragged cloths. She put down the bucket by the chapel door, and began washing the tiles.

Miss Valettas paused in her walk to observe her. She was a tall woman, exceedingly thin. Her face was pale and pinched, and had an empty, meaningless expression, though the beauty and regularity of her features were unmistakeable. Her mouth was small and delicate, her nose straight, and her soft brown eyes, the corners of which had an appearance of being slightly swollen, were surmounted by finely-pencilled eyebrows. But her chin was small, and receded from below her under-lip. As she began washing and rubbing the tiles, Bourbachokátzouli noticed how small were the bones of her wrists, and how delicately her thin hands were formed. Coming down the cloister, she had seemed ill able to bear the heavy bucket with which she struggled along, making short, unequal steps, and now, as she began to scrub, her work was evidently too hard for her. She coughed at very short intervals, a dry, broken

cough, of the sort that seems to echo in the hearer's heart. A sentiment of commiseration prompted Miss Valettas to go near and address her.

"I think, Sister, it was you who brought up my portmanteau last night. Do you remember me?"

The Sister looked up, and pointed to where SILENCE was painted on the wall. Bourbachokátzouli shrugged her shoulders.

"That work is too hard for you, Sister. You are not strong, and carrying that great bucket of water, and stooping over these cold wet tiles will make your cough worse. Could they not get somebody else to do it?"

The Sister did not again lift her eyes from her work.

"Well, Sister, I see you will not speak, but I do pity you. If they have set you to do this work, it is a shame. There are many here stronger than you, and it is they, not you, who ought to be scrubbing cold tiles."

She walked away, wondering who this pale, unhappy Sister was. Another turn round the cloisters had brought her again near where the Sister was at work, when the Mother issued

from the little arch at the bottom of her private stair. The Sister immediately rose from her knees, stood back, and bowed to the Mother as she passed, receiving in return a slight inclination. Miss Valettas continued her walk. Catching sight of her, the Superior turned and beckoned to her to follow. When they were out of the cloisters, she said,

“Where were you going, Miss Valettas?”

“Nowhere. I was only strolling in the cloisters.”

“Hm! I had rather you were employed. Remember, at any rate, that you must not talk there.”

In two or three days Bourbachokátzouli began to know some of the faces she saw oftenest. Nuns' faces are harder to distinguish than those of other women. Studied devotional habits, the constant dropping of the eyes, the depressed mien, expressive of compunction, and association on familiar terms only with a small coterie of others addicted to similar practices, cooperate in producing an uniformity of countenance more strongly marked than the superciliousness of Catholic ecclesiastics, or the attentive, listening look acquired by medical men.

The tall, thin nun, Miss Valettas learned, was Sister Martha. Another, whom she saw frequently, a little chubby body, Sister Irene, who enjoyed a great reputation for piety. The ladies with whom she took her meals had become more sociable, and one of them, a talkative person, who gesticulated with her fork, happening to sit next her at breakfast the third morning, she had been considerably enlightened about the distinctions between quire sisters, lay sisters, outer sisters, novices, postulants, visitors, pensioners, pupils, and so on. It appeared that quire sisters were those who had been able to afford to give money to the establishment, lay sisters those who had not, though the lady who explained these things, herself an outer sister, distinctly denied that such was the case. Outer sisters were ladies, some of them married, living "in the world," more accurately speaking, in Bermondsey, who occasionally came to the convent and played at being Sisters for some weeks. This, at least, was what Miss Valettas gathered from what she heard. Her informant did not say "played." Novices had, of course, taken the white veil. Those who were not as good and obedient as

they should be were often novices for some time. Postulants, if not good enough to be made novices, were turned out at the end of six months. Postulants might be known by their wearing ordinary clothes under their Sister's cloaks. Visitors were people who stayed in the Sisterhood for a time, in order to have the benefit of "a regular life," paying for their board and lodging. The pensioners were a number of beggars and odd people, to whom the Sisters were charitable. As it was at present Lent, there were many visitors and outer Sisters in the convent.

"Oh! it's Lent, is it?" said Miss Valettas.

"Did you not know that? We thought you were a Roman Catholic, and the Roman Catholics set us Anglicans such a holy example about fasting!"

"Oh! yes. But I did not know it was Lent," replied Bourbachokátzouli, with a mystified air, and no suspicion that, "That Miss Valettas did not know it was Lent," would be known to every soul in the convent before twelve hours had passed, and for weeks be repeated in the community room and noviciate as a good story against her. Towards the end of the meal she

ventured herself to make some comments on Sisterhood life.

"It seems to me," she said "that the life here is a very hard life, what I should call a cruel life."

"It's a hard life, a life of self-sacrifice, a life of continual self-oblation," replied the outer Sister, unctuously, "but a very blessed life, a very happy and very peaceful life, far removed from the temptations and evil passions of a wicked world."

How far the inmates of a convent are removed from the temptations and passions of this wicked world, Miss Valettas had soon an opportunity of judging for herself. It was evening. She had corrected, during the day, a great number of exercises, and was tired. After tea, contrary to regulations, she retired to her cell, and lay down. The door, without her knowledge, had been left ajar. As she lay thinking of nothing, hurried steps came down the passage. She heard an angry voice say,

"I'll just see whether she has taken them. Yes, they are gone. Now don't you call that sneaking, Sister Agnes?"

"And mine too."

"It's just like Sister Monica."

"Who is talking of Sister Monica?" exclaimed a shrill voice.

The former speakers were evidently taken by surprise, for a short silence ensued, then the first voice said,

"You have been into my cell, Sister Monica, and taken away my candlesticks."

"And into mine too," said the second voice.

"The candlesticks are not yours; they belong to the chapel."

"But Sister Irene said I might have them."

"And she said I might have mine too."

"Sister Irene is only subsacristan," replied the shrill voice, "and had no right to lend you the candlesticks."

"And you had no right, Sister Monica, to come into our cells on the sly and take away the candlesticks."

"I have a right to the chapel things wherever I find them."

"I say you have not."

"And I say so too."

"I'll speak to the Mother about you, Sister Monica, it is shameful of you to come prying into our cells."

"And I'll speak too."

"You are both showing great want of humility."

"And so are you."

"I'll not be rebuked by you, Sister Ann, at any rate. I'll give you occasion to remember this," quoth Sister Monica.

"There is something for you to remember it by." A sharp slap sounded in the corridor.

"Sister," said the shrill voice of Sister Monica, "I shall not strike you. I thank you. I hope you may repent."

There was a sound of departing steps.

"I shall go and fetch the candlesticks back," said one of the two Sisters now left.

"But they are on the altar. Won't it be sacrilege? We had better not."

"No, we had better not."

Saying which they too went away.

And what did Sister Monica say to Sister Irene? This:

"Sister Irene, Sister Ann and Sister Agnes say you gave them leave to have altar candlesticks in their cells. Is that true, because if it is I shall report your conduct to the Mother, to whom, as——"

"It is not true," exclaimed Sister Irene, unable to wait any longer for her turn to speak.

"You should not interrupt me: what are you doing now? have you done all I bid you?"

"I have done all you bid me."

Sister Monica began searching about the sacristy to see if this was true. Her colleague put her hands behind her, and, leaning against one of the presses, complacently observed her. Presently she said,

"Well, Sister Monica, can you discover anything to find fault with? You have been in town all day, and you always come back in a bad temper, and vent it in discovering what I have done wrong. Perhaps you will tell me whether you can find anything to scold about this time?"

"You have not sewed the lace on the new alb."

"Yes, I have. It is hanging there, in front of your nose."

"You are showing great want of humility, Sister Irene. You forget that humility is the foundation of the religious life. If you behave like this, you shall not be subsacristan."

"I don't want to be."

"You are losing your temper, Sister Irene. I shall report you to the Mother." With this threat, Sister Monica left the sacristy, slamming the door behind her, and leaving Sister Irene to finish folding the linen.

CHAPTER XIII.

“**A**ND, Mother, what do you think of our friend Miss Valettas?” asked Mr. Couton, on the occasion of a visit to the Sisterhood a day or two later.

“I had rather you did not ask me. It ill becomes a religious to speak unkindly: but, I must tell you, she is simply a beautiful animal, nothing more. She loves good things to eat and drink, a soft bed to lie on, comfort, sunshine, and play. Hunger and thirst, cold, inconvenience, and pain, she hates and evades them if she can, like any other animal.”

“I think she is looking much better than when I first saw her.”

“I don’t concern myself about her looks; her behaviour is disgraceful. We have found it impossible to do anything with her. She is an

incompetent teacher, has no notion of keeping order, and affronted the music-mistress to such an extent that the latter threatened to leave me at a moment's notice. In the work-room she was useless. Now she simply idles about the place, setting a bad example, and breaking rules."

"I am grieved to hear you say so, and surprised. I thought the girl seemed desirous to please."

"Please! Oh, yes, I daresay she is desirous to please, in order to be admired, and to get petted and noticed. She is a sort of cat. Here, where she does not get flattered, petted, and noticed, you have no idea of how she goes on. This morning at ten, when the Sisters went to make her bed, she had not got up, but was lying in bed reading a French novel."

"She is half a Frenchwoman."

"I don't know what she is not, that is bad. I went to speak to her myself. She said she wanted no breakfast, and was not well, and thought she had better stay where she was. When I asked her why she had not overnight told the Sister in charge of the corridor that she was not well, she replied, saucily, that "She

did not see how she was to know overnight when she was going to have a headache the next morning."

"There was some truth in that."

"It is a thing I will not allow, Mr. Couton. I *will* know overnight when anyone here is to be put on the sick list. I made her get up, and I have taken her abominable books away from her. I will not have such books read here. It is a disgrace that they should be in a religious house, and she has actually been reading them in her cell, in the common-room, about the corridors, and in the cloisters, and that though I myself told her not to idle about the place. But words are wasted on such a woman. Where on earth did you find her?"

The Mother's temper was rising visibly under the irritating recollection of Miss Valettas' delinquencies.

"She came to Sarleigh in great distress. I cannot say I personally feel very sure about her. I am a bad judge of character. I am sure Sarleigh has graver doubts about her respectability than he chooses to confess. But Mrs. Couton is satisfied, and she seldom errs. I suppose the poor girl's notion of life is very

different from ours. She is young and handsome and fond of pleasure. That is all very natural, and, at her age, not very wrong. I don't think we should forbid her all her pleasures. At least we must be patient with her."

"She is past my patience. I do not believe she ever says her prayers. She never says grace. Last Sunday she spent like a heathen, sitting in the common-room reading her abominable books. One of the Sisters asked what book she was reading, and she told her it was a treatise on the vanity of the world, by a very learned and holy French prelate. Who would suppose so young a woman to be so thoroughly unprincipled? But I never thought her truthful. Her conduct makes me positively indignant, and I mean to let her know it."

"Mother," replied the priest, severely, "if you can do any good, do it, and God speed you. But don't imagine that any good is done by exhibiting your indignation. It helps nobody, and nobody cares."

The Superior bit her lip, and spoke of how sadly she felt the loss of the tender advice of that holy priest, the former vicar, whom she should not again see till they met in Paradise.

He understood the depths of the higher life, and the more subtle feelings of religious souls.

Quite ready to confess he was himself unequal to all this, Mr. Couton, on the other hand, promised to reason with the naughty girl, whom he thought he could understand, and did so.

"Oh, Mr. Couton," she pleaded, "let me go back to my lodgings. This place is a prison. I tried to be useful, but, try as I would, I could not do as they wanted. Really, I have been well taught. I do know things, and I can teach, if they would let me. I am sure I could help the girls with their music, and their French, and their singing, if I could not do anything else. And I should like to do something for the nuns, in return for their housing me and putting up with me. I should be happier if I had something to do. Now they will give me no work, and to-day have taken away my few books. I don't care for the books they offer me. I must not read, I must not dress, I must not walk about the place. I have asked for leave to go out and been refused. I do not know what to do with myself. Do let me go back to my lodgings."

"But think of the expenses of your lodgings."

"I have a little money left."

"I am glad to hear it. Will it not be wise to husband it?"

"Yes. And it is not really mine, only borrowed. If I had earned it, I should have more right to waste it. Oh, Mr. Couton, it is hard to be poor!"

"That it is, Miss Valettas. I have been always very poor, and I know all about it, and am sorry for you." He laid his great, broad palm on the little white hands clasped tightly in her lap, and added, encouragingly, "But I think I have read that your countrymen can be brave under their misfortunes, and you must show us that Greek women have spirit still."

"Oh, yes," she said, looking up at him with a bright face and glistening eyes. "If they would treat me as you do, I would not break rules then. But if I am to be hounded about, there is that in me which will not brook it. I cannot help it, and I reckon not the consequences."

"Don't be rash. You shall come to see Mrs. Couton again soon. That will be a little change."

"A very pleasant one."

The girl had not exaggerated the irksomeness of her position. She found herself practically confined to the dismal common room. She was wanted nowhere else. Loitering in passages was forbidden, and even the use of her own cell, by a rule she frequently broke, was interdicted by the Sisterhood during a great part of the day. She had positively nothing to do, and that in a house where everybody was busy. So she was reduced to amusing herself with observing those around her, an occupation far from unentertaining, but fatiguing when the greater part of the day is spent in silence and solitude. For the mere sake of changing the scene of observation, she would have offered her services to the lay sisters scrubbing the floors, and working in the kitchen. But she was certain that those services would be declined. She had become a kind of *bête-noir*. For the lack of anything better to do, she lounged about, wondering when the clocks would next strike, and talking, in talking hours and out of talking hours, with anyone that would talk to her.

Thus, though shunned by most of the better

Sisters, women leading hard lives and toiling daily through hard, useful work, with eyes blinded by labour to all that was not laborious and useful, she heard from naughty novices and insubordinate postulants a good many queer bits of Sisterhood gossip, the meanest, commonest, personal, feminine tittle-tattle any woman ever lowered herself by listening to. She wondered, after leaving the convent, how she found patience to give ear to such nonsense, and realized by how short a path a narrow, monotonous life leads to infantile thoughts and despicable chattering, by how short a residence there she might have become like the rest, dully absorbed in the mechanical life of the community.

It was during these days, in which, for lack of interest, she was becoming interested in every triviality about her, that she learnt how Sister Martha had been discovered to possess a tooth-brush, and been punished for it with three weeks' unbroken silence, and how Sister somebody else was, for appropriating community money for the benefit of her friends outside, expelled "without her clothes," that is to say, without her conventual clothes, and dressed as an ordinary woman, an indescribable

indignity from the Sisterhood point of view. Sister Irene told her something far more wonderful. She had taken a short-lived liking to Bourbachokátzouli, Sisters' friendships are not lasting, and narrated to her a wonderful miracle that had some years before taken place at the convent. There lived at the West-End a certain young lady, extravagant, dissipated, and utterly sold to the world, if not to the flesh and the devil. She could only exist in London during the season, and spent the rest of the year in travelling and visiting fashionable people. Had she spent August in London, she would certainly have died. Sister Irene had heard her say so. But this worldly young person chanced to hear a sermon by the former Vicar of St. Adhelm's, and was on the spot converted. She became a Sister. Now summer and winter she lived in the Sisterhood. She had never once left it, and she was still alive.

"That *is* a miracle," said Bourbachokátzouli.

Sister Irene told one of her friends that evening that Miss Valettas was not so bad as she had been represented.

Stimulated by Mr. Couton's suggestion that she should try to do the intractable girl some

good, the Superior sent for her, and, to her own great inconvenience, for every hour of her day was apportioned to various duties, talked to her seriously about her neglect of religion. The young lady only replied sulkily that she was a Romanist. The Mother suggested her going to Mass next Sunday.

"Ah, well! it is a very long time since I went to Mass, certainly. I suppose I ought to go. If I go, may I dress properly?"

"It would be better for you, my child, to think more of your soul, and less of your clothes."

"I imagine it would. But, Mother, one gets into a habit of thinking about one thing, and of not thinking about another, and I always have thought about my clothes. However, if I go to Mass, I may dress as I like?"

"Nobody cares how you dress, silly child."

"I care though!"

"Well, you shall dress as you like. And one of the Sisters shall go with you."

"No, thank you. I won't go. I don't want to go to Mass. I had rather not."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to go with a Sister. If you

will let me go alone, I'll go. I don't care to be seen going about with a keeper."

"If you had always had a keeper, as you call it, I am inclined to think some of your adventures might have taken a different turn."

"I am sure of it. With a Sister for a keeper I should have cut my throat, or hers, before the end of a fortnight."

"You seem to forget, Miss Valettas," said the Mother, with all the coolness with which one woman can humiliate another, "that the compassion of the Sisters is now helping to shelter and feed you."

"Against my will, Mother, against my will. Let me go. I had rather go."

"No. You shall not go. Where would you go, silly child?"

"Go!" exclaimed the girl, rising from her seat, and stretching her arms straight down, and clenching her fists. "Go! I'd rather starve in the streets than stay here."

"The streets! I daresay you are more at home in them. But I do not intend to have on my conscience the crime of having let you return to your life in the streets, madam."

"What do you dare to mean by 'my life in the streets'?"

She stepped quickly across the room to where the Superior was standing, and stood glaring into her face fierce and breathless.

"Are you going to make a scene, Miss Valettas?" asked the Mother, with frigid calmness.

"No," said the girl, recovering her self-command, but just in time to escape making herself ridiculous. Then, turning away, she walked out of the room, with her teeth clenched together, and her black eyes staring straight out from under her knitted brows.

She went down the turret stairs and along the cloister. A leafless sprig of Virginia creeper hung from one of the arches. She snapped it off as she passed, and began viciously breaking it up, strewing the pieces on the ground as she walked. Suddenly remembering that to keep the cloisters tidy was one of poor Sister Martha's duties, she turned back, and, picking up the little broken scraps, put them in her pocket. This done, she sauntered on more slowly, till the open door of the refectory, generally locked at that time, attracted

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sweet hope of liberty. At the end of that time she received a message. "The Mother Superior sends her compliments to Miss Valettas, and wishes her to know that she may remain at the Sisterhood." Which decision Bourbachokátzouli attributed, very unjustly, to the Mother's spite, little thinking of the anxious counsel the good woman had taken with the chaplain and two senior Sisters, and that it was she who had concluded, in opposition to their judgment, that, "Badly as Miss Valettas has behaved, I will not, merely to avoid annoyances, turn a penniless, homeless, thoughtless young woman into the streets. She shall have another trial, and I must look after her somewhat more strictly."

Happily for everybody the new regime of stricter surveillance was only of some two or three hours' duration. During that time the rebel announced that she should no longer wear a cap, nor a dress without a train, nor go about without her ear-rings, "with two holes in her ears quite naked." What would have happened next it would be difficult to imagine. Fortunately, Sarleigh called and succeeded in leaving his protégée more tractable than he found her. He had meant to visit her be-

fore, and several times had got as far as the Sisterhood doorstep, but there, for unknown reasons, his courage had invariably failed him, and after a lagging return to his lodgings, the subsequent evenings had been on these occasions spent in regretting that he had not seen her, and in determining to be wiser on the morrow. Even this time he walked up and down in front of the convent for half an hour before his courage rose to the effort of ringing the bell, and he would probably have gone home, and his purpose have remained once more unaccomplished, had he not promised Mr. Couton that he would call in the course of the day.

His incarcerated friend was pleased enough to see him. On his asking how she liked living amongst the Sisters, she replied,

“Do you remember where you said I should go if I drowned myself?”

“That is not a thing to jest about.”

“No. But what I meant is, if that was very horrible, it is not very nice here.”

“I am sorry you are not happy.”

“I am not happy. I am far from happy.” She commenced, in corroboration of this state-

ment, a laconic history of what she had done and endured. Her account might not have tallied in every particular with that the Superior would have given, but no attempt was made to conceal her unruliness. At the end she said, "And to conclude, the Mother has said to me things worse than any you thought. That does not sound pleasant, does it?"

"No," replied Sarleigh, emphatically.

She looked askance at him, and nodded her head, thinking, "So I have at last made you confess it."

"It is vexing that the Mother should have been so inconsiderate," said the curate, who had not the faintest idea of having committed himself, nor of what was passing in his companion's mind. "I should have thought everybody would be pleased to help *you*."

"Should you? How am I to get out of this place, Mr. Sarleigh?"

She rose and began pacing the room.

"You want to go from here! Why?"

"Why? I have told you. We dress, eat, drink, sleep, walk about by rules and regulations. They say prayers too on the same system. Thanks to my being a Roman Catholic,

I escape that. I am accustomed to change, amusements, variety, something going on. This monotony drives me mad, positively mad."

She shook her head impatiently, and then smoothed with her hands her tumbled hair.

"And you want to go from here?"

"I have said so several times."

She continued walking up and down the room. The deacon sat and pondered what he should say. He was too timid to propose what seemed obvious, that they should scheme for her return to her lodgings. After a long time he repeated,

"And so you want to go from here?"

She was at the moment behind him, so that he could not see her. She stopped in her walk and relieved her impatience by a glance of contempt and a slight shrug of her shoulders. After that she sat down again, and, leaning back in her chair, began counting the links in her watch-chain. Sarleigh availed himself of her silence and downcast eyes to indulge in a long, steadfast gaze, and a yearning for the fair creature's conversion. Soon the lengthening silence became awkward. The deacon felt momentarily more and more uncomfortable,

she, without showing it, more and more amused. A cart passed in a side street. "When that is gone by," thought he, "I will speak."

The cart passed, and the rumbling sound of its wheels was lost in the distance, and still he had not had courage to break the silence. A spider crawled out of a corner and commenced letting itself down from the ceiling by its sting. Sarleigh, whose eyes, wandering in vain search of an idea, had seen it, determined to speak when the creature reached the level of the top of a large picture. When it had descended so far, he decided to wait till it had got to the top of the wainscot, till it had landed on the floor, till it had run out of sight, and even then he was afraid to part his lips. Every second made speech more difficult. The silence was overpowering, appalling. The ticking of his watch was audible; soon, by dint of listening, that of Miss Valettas' became so too. She still counted the links in her chain. A singing noise began to sound in the cleric's ears. He must say something, but what? What, indeed? He was becoming too nervous to think.

Bourbachokátzouli rose at last, and, offering her hand, said,

"Good afternoon, Mr. Sarleigh."

He shook hands with her, and, taking his hat, went to the door. There he paused and looked round. She was watching him.

"I am afraid I have been very stupid this afternoon," he said, timidly.

"Very. Are you in love?"

He might have said "Yes" with truth, and was fast realizing that he might. Only "Yes" in reply to this question, asked in the tone of raillery in which she asked it, could have been equivalent only to "No." He said, stupidly,

"No. I was thinking."

"That has a bewildering effect on most men, I know."

"You see, as I knew you were not happy here——"

"If you did not know it, it was not for want of being told."

"No, only if you would let me speak, and seriously."

"I have plenty of seriousness here. Still, if you wish it, I am at your service. A little stupidity, more or less, can make no difference."

She put her hand over her mouth, and pretended to yawn, a manoeuvre which had the

desired effect of making the deacon despondent.

"This is better, Miss Valettas, than starving in the street," he commenced.

"I don't see why you should be always referring to that part of my existence, and I am not certain this is better. I am ennuyée."

"You must find a cure for that."

"I intend to. What does your reverence recommend? A clandestine love affair?"

Sarleigh looked her in the face. A smile more mischievous than pretty played round her compressed lips, and her long eyes, wickedly closed at the corners, twinkled with suspicious light. The deacon's heart sank like a stone. He had not been ashamed to confess to himself how much he had missed her since she went to the Sisterhood, but that mien of hers made him believe he should soon come to be ashamed he had ever made her acquaintance. To her indecorous suggestion he gravely replied,

"Not that, nor anything else that would lower you in your own and others' estimation."

"Oh, dear! Lower me! I did not know I could go any lower."

"In my estimation you could."

"Really! I am surprised to hear it. Since you have so high an opinion of me, what will you recommend your humble servant to try instead of—ahem."

"As you are a Roman Catholic——"

"I do not wish to hear about religion."

"But hear me out. You might send for a priest to advise you. You could see any one you liked. Perhaps he could help you."

Her head sank in thought, and she raised her hand to her lips.

"If I wished, I might have any priest I liked to see me."

"Certainly."

He spoke positively, though feeling a little uncomfortable about the great concession to her religious opinions he was making. The proposal, to his surprise, immediately put her in a good temper. They parted as pleasantly as he could desire, and, after he was gone, Bourbachokátzouli went to the Mother, who, in spite of the time she had already spent on her, patiently consented again to see her for a few minutes, and to hear the announcement that Mr. Sarleigh had been speaking to her very seriously, and had persuaded her to be-

have better. Now she wanted leave to write to a Roman Catholic priest whom she knew, to ask him to come and talk to her. To this the Superior at once consented, and proposed that the letter should be written on the spot, and put into her hands to deliver. Miss Valettas declined this, on the ground that she must well consider what she was going to write.

Yet the letter, when once begun, did not take long to compose, perhaps forty seconds. Afterwards it was put into an envelope. That took a few seconds more. Then Bourbachokát-zouli again took up her pen to direct it. Having held the pen full five minutes over the envelope, whilst she doubted, she laid it down again, saying, "I'll not risk directing it, for fear I should mislay it." By which it appears that this sagacious young lady was not above the common human frailty of making stupid mistakes. For whatever peril may be attached to the direction of a letter, none less can be involved in the letter itself. And undirected letters, when found, must be opened.

This entirely useless precaution having, however, been taken, she next cast about for a means of getting the letter secretly posted.

The postulant Caroline seemed the person most likely to consent to undertake a furtive commission. But she watched for her in vain at the times the Sisters generally came in from parish work. The Superior had discovered that Caroline liked the parish visiting, and so she had been immediately set to needlework instead, it being a principle in Sisterhoods that everyone shall do what they like least. When Miss Valettas at last came across the postulant, she was in a bad temper, and evidently far from inclined to be obliging. But the letter was to be posted, and there being no one else to whom it could be trusted, by some means Caroline was to be coaxed into taking it.

"Carry, you look scared," said the temptress. "I know what that horrible work-room is. The stitch, stitch, reduced me to the verge of idiotcy, and both made me as hungry as a wolf and took away my appetite at the same time. Don't go to needlework this afternoon. Come upstairs into my cell, nobody will know where you are. I have some sweet biscuits, and you shall have a good look at my looking-glass."

Caroline had a weakness for sweet bis-

cuits, but it was the glass that seduced her. Looking-glasses are forbidden in Sisterhoods, and the fascination of the mirror, heightened by inhibition, is so irresistible to the feminine mind that Sisters out on duty have been known to stop before the upholsterers' windows to steal a furtive glance at themselves, and the little girls in orphanages to risk punishment for the sake of a look in the glass, and to have been punished, too, for looking! No marvel that a mere postulant succumbed.

The girls stole upstairs. Bourbachokátzouli sat on the bed. Caroline had the glass, not a very large one, and a hand-glass, too, to enjoy, and soon became better tempered and talkative. She was going home the next day to see her friends. The Sisters wanted to make a lay Sister of her, and she meant to brook no such humiliation.

"They don't catch me playing second fiddle, I can tell them. I've seen enough of this. There's nothing to do but what you don't like, and I don't care for the company. Many of the Sisters are not ladies, and those that are get bullied for it. Teaching them humility, they call it. There's Sister Martha, for example,

she's a lady. I'll take jolly good care they don't teach me humility like they teach it to Sister Martha. I wonder what the Mother Sup would say if she could see me with my hair dressed up like this?"

"Why, Carry, what a pretty girl you are! Now you have taken off that horrible cap and dressed your hair properly one can see it. You ought to cut your hair short and frizz it. If you were in a theatre half the men in the place would find you out in five minutes."

"Do you really think so?" asked the delighted Caroline, who had as rosy a good-natured face without a trace of beauty as any plain girl within the four seas. "I should like to try frizzing my hair."

"Cut a little in front short, and twist it tight round a hair-pin, and then you will see how nice it will look," said the temptress. "See, here are the scissors. You were talking of Sister Martha. Tell me something about her."

"There is a mystery about her, only a little one, but a little goes a long way here. She is here for a love affair. Is that short enough?"

"Wait. Give me the scissors. There, that is better," said Bourbachokátzouli, at the same

time snipping off a lock here and there. "What lovely hair you have, Carry," she continued, taking up the postulant's heavy black hair in her hands, "you are never going to let them cut this off. It would be a sin. Tell me about Sister Martha."

"My cousins knew her. It's not fair to tell her name, and after all there is nothing to tell. A man made love to her. She's rather soft, you know, and she got very fond of him. Some people say—well, we'll let that pass. After all, it turned out that this man noticed her only to make another girl he really liked jealous. So when this other girl consented to have him, he married her. Then Sister Martha came here. I fancy she had been spoilt at home. Here they soon take the nonsense out of you. She was rather good-looking. Of course, good-looking Sisters know they are good-looking, and they always get snubbed. They say in the noviciate that, when Sister Martha was a postulant, she told the Sisters that her heart felt as if it was all over bruises, which has been a good story against her ever since. Oh, I say, Miss Valettas, does not my hair begin to look awfully nice?"

"Awfully! Poor Sister Martha! Have you noticed what a bad cough she has? Why do they make her do such rough work?"

"Partly because she hates it, and partly to humble her."

"Is she proud?"

"She was."

"Does she care for him still?"

"Well, that's the question. Of course she oughtn't. But the other day they found she still had a little book of German songs he gave her. Of course, you know, they take everything away from us here, even religious books and pictures. We must not have anything of our own. She had no right to keep the book, and her doing so looked queer. She's always in scrapes, that is why she has been a novice so long. What between him and them she has had rather a rough time of it, I fancy. She is out nursing some sick children now. There, look at my hair!"

"Oh, you darling Carry! I must kiss you. You look so nice," exclaimed Bourbachokátzouli, suiting the action to the word, and then holding the postulant at arm's length and pretending to be enchanted with the results of the

frizzing. "Take off that nasty black thing and see if you can get into one of my dresses."

There were many reasons why Caroline could not get into one of Miss Valettas' dresses, but she vastly enjoyed trying. Meanwhile the subject of the letter was broached.

"I don't mind taking it," quoth Caroline. "I'm going to leave, I know, and I don't care for the Sisters, and the Mother Sup."

So the letter was directed, and entrusted to her hands.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAROLINE went to see her friends, and on her way slipped Miss Valettas' letter into a pillar-post. Montenotte in the afternoon received the following letter :

" The Sisterhood, St. Adhelm's.

" DEAR MR. MONTENOTTE,

" I am staying at a convent !

" A Roman Catholic priest would be allowed to visit me.

" If *you* were to come I should not mind seeing you.

" But can you consent to the sacrifice of that lovely moustache ?

" Yours truly,

" M. BALETAS."

Montenotte read the note twice, and then replaced it with care in its envelope. It had come whilst he was painting, and painting with enjoyment, but the brush was laid down at once, and his picture for a time forgotten.

For a few days he had been working diligently. "The Farewell" had made considerable progress. Art earnestly taken up, noiselessly displaced the uncongenial trifles that occupied his attention whilst nothing more engaging presented itself. After a long recreation, too, his intelligence had arisen to work, fresh, and strong, and full of fancy. And, as he hastened to shape, chasten, express the new ideas and new perceptions that succeeded each other, his life grew absorbed in his picture, till he seemed to be ever standing on pink heather-bells, a witness of the parting, in August sunshine, of two that could never come together again, feeling with a double consciousness what was felt by each of them, and perceiving more clearly, and more clearly still, how the dead colours could be made to express some of what he saw and felt, not all, the ability to do that never comes.

The man was in his true element, enjoying

the powers he had, enjoying the toil of acquiring power, enjoying the promise of power to come, compared with which what he had should be weakness. To labour to express his conceptions seemed to him no longer an unworthy purpose in life. He thought no more of being of less use than an arm-chair, nor of turning his hand to hedging and ditching. He left burning social questions for those to scorch their fingers with who have no better work for their hands, and neglected seances on these subjects with the recklessness they deserved.

But he was content. He was more anxious to satisfy himself than to gain applause, and yet was concerned about his picture's success, for its own sake rather than his, like a parent for a child's. His painted people (strange fancy!) seemed to live and to have claims on him, and a right to denounce their creator if he did them less than justice. Short though the time was, with every faculty full strung, his life had become marvellously changed, and was still changing. Yet he often stopped, as he entered the studio, or left it, to look at the little pencil sketch of his Greek friend, though never except when alone. Not

that he was himself conscious of this habit. Thus, when Miss Valettas's letter arrived, to think of it and of her, was to think of some one of whom he fancied he had not thought lately, and of whom he had thought more than he knew.

"Sly puss!" was his first verdict. "Poor girl!" his second. Then he fell dreaming of the two occasions on which he had met her, and trying to recover impressions of all that had passed. His reverie was interrupted by the imperative necessity of dressing for a dinner-party, during which he was at times distrait. At home at last, and alone, he took the little note from its envelope, and once more perused it.

Its pithyness, slyness, and sauciness amused him immensely. He felt flattered—perhaps that should have been put first—that the letter had come to him. And he determined to know whether its writer did or did not have other visitors. As he pondered a little more carefully all the note might mean, he began to feel concerned, concerned about the peril of an imprudent, ingenuous, attractive girl, for such he was pleased to consider its writer.

"I know fifty men, not bad fellows, who would make her repent of having sent them that letter. And it is a temptation to a man to take liberties, when a woman lays herself out for mischief like this. I'm glad it is I, and not some other men I know, who am honoured with this communication. Only, if she goes on like this! After all, it is no jest."

He at least seemed, judging by his look at that moment, to take it seriously enough. Should he go or not? For many reasons it was better not to go. But, if he wrote to say he would not come, he must make up his mind, after such a reply to such an invitation, to having seen the last of Bourbachokátzouli Valettas, and he felt now more desirous than ever of again meeting and conversing with her. If he wrote her a paternal warning, he would be an ass. If he sent her no answer, a snob. And so, "go I must, sacrifice my moustache, get a clerical waistcoat, and a round collar, and look like a parson. So much for listening to the singing of Greek Syrens."

When he went, what should he say to her? Evidently she expected merely to wile away some dull hour in pleasant talk. And that

would be very agreeable. She was young, pretty, witty, and fairly well taught. An hour with a woman who fulfils these conditions is a privilege not often conceded to men, and, if the lady happens to be in a good temper, a very pleasant one. But, pursuing the subject in his own mind, Montenotte perceived that this would be equivalent to giving the girl his hand to take the first step, if it was the first (he bit his lip over that thought), down the ladder of ruin. What could he do more unkind than show her she might be indiscreet with impunity, and trust herself without danger to the honour of any man she might happen to have met twice? He would not do that. He would rather warn her as courteously as possible, tell her she must not judge other people by herself. And if that failed, and she would not be warned? "Then," he concluded his thoughts, "I shall be sorry. I admire the girl, and should be pained to see her undone. And that is the truth." He was about to burn her note, but instead, replaced it in his pocket.

Two days later, when she was beginning to be anxious about the consequences of her letter,

a sister announced to Miss Valettas that a priest had come to see her, a Father Beuvelet.

Bourbachokátzouli's heart leapt with surprise. Some events astonish us when they come, though they have been foreseen, and even looked for. It was with mixed pleasure and hesitation that she went to the parlour where the Sister said Father Beuvelet awaited her, and where the Mother had given orders she and her confessor might, without being disturbed, converse as long as they liked.

The parlour was a small room, near the entrance, where were received visitors, purchasers of Sisterhood work, and sometimes the Sisters' relatives or friends. It boasted a square of red carpet not large enough to cover the bare space in the middle of the partly coloured floor, and had a single window, of which some panes were whitened over, some covered with pictures in imitation of stained glass. The furniture consisted of a deal table, some wiudsor chairs, two cane-bottomed ones the worse for wear, an old mahogany secretary, a key-board for practising, standing on a small shabby table in a corner, and a cupboard with glass doors containing things, mostly of worsted, offered

for sale. A copy of the crucifixion by Durer hung over the fire. On the walls were several miserable chromo-lithographs of religious subjects, painted texts, and a printed list of the districts and district visitors of the parish of Saint Adhelm. A marble cross, a shabby inkstand the bottle of which was lost, a box with a hole in the top for alms, and a tarnished ormolu saucer adorned the chimney-piece. On the door was a hat peg.

Whilst Montenotte was taking a mental survey of this apartment and its contents, a Sister entered and lighted the fire: a piece of unmerited indulgence on the Mother's part. The nun eyed the artist closely, and he did his best to look as he should. To assist himself in this he took a small book from his pocket, and having opened it in one place, and put his right first finger into another, muttered to himself and fluttered the leaves about in imitation of a priest with a breviary. This performance was not wasted on the Sister, who, the first instant speaking was allowed, reported that the priest who had come to see Miss Valettas was a very handsome man, and wonderfully devout.

"The priest" was getting tired of watching the fire burn when his penitent entered and cautiously locked the door before shaking hands. She thanked him for coming, said she was well, but dying of ennui, and asked him to sit down. He took a chair by the fire, she one opposite him, and the campaign commenced, for it was a campaign. Montenotte opened fire with a sufficiently common-place remark.

"You find this place dull."

"Very."

"How came you to be here?"

"Mr. Couton recommended me, on the score of economy and respectability, to come here till I could get work. Of course I have nothing to do, and the regulations drive me distracted."

"I see," said the artist, and unwittingly paused an instant, thinking of what he meant presently to say. Momentary, as the hesitation was, it unmasked him. Miss Valettas, who was looking at him, noted the faint shade of anxiety on his face, and thought, "That man has something on his mind. He has not come here only to amuse me." And at the same time, feeling disappointed, she resolved that he should not say what he intended to say.

"Yes, it is dull here," she observed, "and not only dull, but very disagreeable. I myself have no taste for hardships. Here they form the staple of existence, and, though I have an easier life than most of the inmates of the Sisterhood, I find it rougher than I like. It is depressing to live where so many people are wretched around you."

"That was generously said. But you are pitying people who don't pity themselves. Their rough life makes you shudder. If you could see into it, you would find they too make themselves happy, as others do in very different circumstances. And I am told they do a great deal of good."

"Chiefly outside, I suppose. There is not much good inside, unless jealousies, bitternesses, and much silliness and suffering are good."

"Nonsense, Miss Valettas. You exaggerate. Let us talk of something else."

"He is trying to come to his point," she thought, and said, "But I should like to know first what you think of the life Sisters lead."

"A useful life, not harder than that of many others, much quieter, and to most of them, no doubt, a happy life. People have a way of managing to be happy."

"I think it a cruel life, a life that crushes and kills. A woman must have extraordinary ways of being happy to be happy here."

"No, on the other hand very simple ways, only very different from yours and mine."

Again she thought he was approaching his point, and so asked,

"Have you been painting much lately?"

"I have become quite diligent since we last met. You must come to Chiswick and see what I have done."

"At which picture have you been working?"

Montenotte realized that his fair antagonist had scented his *arrière-pensée*, and was designedly keeping him at a distance from any subject of conversation he himself chose. Instead, therefore, of replying to her question, he said, making a good feint of sudden recollection,

"By-the-by, you must think me rude. All this time I have not thanked you for your note."

"Never mind my note, let me hear about your picture."

But he had seen her tactics, and would no longer be kept at bay.

"Presently," he replied. "Let me tell you

your note interested me. It showed me you had formed a curious estimate of myself."

The words "A false one?" trembled on her lips, but she smothered her curiosity, and only said,

"I see you think me incapable of discussing your picture with you."

"By no means. I am only more interested in something else. I, too, had formed an estimate of you, and your letter half modified and half confirmed it."

No woman, he thought, could let that pass unchallenged. But he erred. Fretted with mortified curiosity she was, but still resolved not to yield. She dropped her eyes, and said, chillingly,

"Your last remark is rather more personal than I have a right to expect."

"Pardon me. I thought——"

"Your thoughts misled you, Mr. Montenotte. Let us change the subject. How is your friend Mr. Sarleigh?"

"Very well, I believe."

He was determined to try another course, to decline any subject of conversation she might choose.

"Have you seen him lately?"

"Not lately."

"Not since I called with him?"

"Not since."

"He was here a day or two since."

"Yes."

"And almost as dull as——"

"As who?"

"You."

"Ah!"

No man could continue in this key. It was so hideously discourteous. Obliged again to confess himself baffled, the artist ventured on another direct attack.

"Frankly, Miss Valettas, I want to speak to you about your note. Permit me."

"No."

"I beg that you will."

"You will oblige me by saying no more about my note. Let it be forgotten."

"You think that, though you yourself made the assignation, you have a right to ask that?"

She coloured slightly as she somewhat hurriedly replied,

"Certainly. I have a right. A lady is always right."

The decision of her voice for the instant veiled her mortification. One word, "assignation," had suddenly uncovered to her view the nature of the embarrassment into which her infatuation had plunged her. Meaning only to beguile her dull days with a droll piece of mischief, she had compromised herself fatally, and found herself now in one of those false positions from which there is no retreat except what a man's good nature may pitifully accord. Her one hope of extricating herself without discredit was that Montenotte might have generosity sufficient to forego taking advantage of her thoughtlessness. His determination to press her about her letter denoted, she feared, no such liberality. He was an artist, and might think any imprudent girl fair sport. Then what should she do? To deny having written the letter was impossible, or she would without hesitation have denied it. To be angry was vulgar. It was contemptible to appear sorry. Perfect insouciance, savoured of effrontery and invited suspicion. Her demand, made on the spur of the moment, to have the whole affair instantly buried in oblivion, was itself more akin to this than she liked, yet, if he refused her the privilege she claimed,

no other expedient suggested itself to her.

Bourbachokátzouli's courage failed. Yet she had no grounds for becoming so greatly alarmed. The artist was the sort of man her calmer, not her frightened, thought believed him. After her intrepid assertion of a privilege to be always in the right, by which he was alike amused and pleased, he could not commit the rudeness of further direct allusion to her mistake. In what light she regarded it herself he had no idea. Still, out of pure good-will, determined to warn her he was. After a fruitless look at her impenetrable face, with a view to arriving at some clue to her thoughts, he re-commenced,

"As you please. Let us talk of other things. Since I have been painting more, I have been more amongst my artist friends. Some are queer fellows, and some good fellows, too. I was at a supper-party last night with a number of them. We had a grand entertainment, and plenty of pranks."

Miss Valettas' face had brightened instantly. She said now,

"That must have been fun. Tell me all about it. Your men's parties must be charm-

ing, when there are none of us women there to plague you."

"A number of good stories were told at supper, amongst them some strangely funny histories of artistic impudence. After examples of every species of masculine and feminine impertinence, exaggerated to the highest degree, and of the most bizarre description, had been freely related and laughed over, one man bet he could cap all by a specimen of yet more outrageous effrontery. The bet was taken, and he produced a letter written to him by a lady he had met but twice."

Their eyes met. The amused look had quite vanished from Bourbachokátzouli's face.

"Did he win his bet?" she asked.

"Yes. We were compelled unanimously to confess that, with all our experience of human impertinence, we should not have supposed there was a woman breathing who could have penned such a note, and to an artist."

"Do you think that the lady who wrote that letter had any idea it would be shown?"

"I am sure, if she had suspected such a thing, she could not have written as she did."

"And that man knew that."

"Of course."

"Then his showing it there was simply infamous. What became of the note?"

"One of the other men pocketed it. I don't know which. He said he was going to have it framed, and hang it over his chimney-piece."

Miss Valettas' embarrassment and annoyance were becoming obviously painful, despite her attempt to conceal them. She had changed her position five or six times in the last two minutes, her eyes were restless, and though she kept her hands still, a marvellous feat of self-control that the artist noticed and admired, it was only by knitting her fingers together and pressing them against one another with a force that gave her pain. After a pause, she said, contemptuously,

"What a snob that man must be!"

She looked hard at Montenotte. He shrugged his shoulders.

"The lady was imprudent to write as she did," he said.

"And *you* think it fair that for a simple act of thoughtlessness a woman should be gibbeted like that?"

"I do not think it fair. I thought it most

unfair. Only it is a pity that ladies—— But I shall offend you.”

“Oh, dear, no! Go on, please.”

“It is a pity that some of you ladies judge other people by yourselves. Because you mean no harm, you suppose we men will be honourable, and think no harm.”

“It seems we make a great mistake in thinking you know anything about honour. However, you may console yourself. We do not make the same mistake twice. When we have once learnt the depth of men’s cowardly meanness, we know well enough how to treat them.”

She spoke with the bitterest scorn she could master, looking straight in his eyes the while. But he bore the cutting taunts with more than coolness, with a smile of satisfaction that nauseated her. He had, in fact, effected his purpose: his ruse had succeeded, and she was warned. Never, he felt sure, would she again write such a note as she had sent to him. But his next words, in which he presumed to advise her, made her, irritated as she already was, yet more uncontrollably, speechlessly angry.

“You are right,” he said, “to be on your

guard. It is only common prudence, and you owe it to yourself." He could see that he was going beyond her powers of endurance, and continued, rather more gently, "I felt myself annoyed at what took place. I considered it precisely what you called it, cowardly, mean, ungentlemanly. And I did protest. I hope I would rather be shot than play any woman such a trick, more particularly one who had trusted me, and been a little thoughtless."

She listened with astonishment. She had been so certain he was the culprit, and the letter her letter.

"If you," she asked, with lips literally quivering, "had such a letter, should you not show it to your friends?"

"I am sorry you think so ill of me as to ask such a question. I certainly would not show it. Such a letter implies confidence or a mistake. A mistake merits pity, at least, and confidence loyalty. Had I had that letter, I should have felt certain the writer might some day repent of it, and, knowing that, I should not even have burnt it, because she could not know whether I had burnt it or not. I think I should have taken it back to herself to burn."

He drew an envelope from his breast-pocket and gave it to her. As she suspected the envelope contained her letter. She said only, "Thanks," and hung her head whilst she examined it, to be sure it was her own, before she committed it to the flames.

"No one has seen it," he said. "I only wished to warn you." But she took no notice, said no word about it. She was determined he should know nothing of what she had suffered or thought. When the note was reduced to ashes, and the ashes crumbled to dust, she said,

"You have been here a long time. You must go."

In vain he pleaded for a little longer stay, for a pleasant little chat. It was not her fault, she said, that the time had been wasted in misunderstandings. Would she let him come again? No, she would not.

"I'll behave better next time," he said. "You could not think of letting me shave off my moustache, and learn to wear all these queer clothes——"

"All for the sake of coming to see me once. I quite understand. It is not worth it. And, seeing an hour in my company is worth so

little, I won't encroach further on your valuable time."

"I shall think you are angry with me."

"Very well! I have been. Did you not deserve it?"

"Let me come again, once."

"I have nothing to do with who comes here."

"Then I shall come."

"I have not asked you."

"But perhaps you will see me?"

"And perhaps I will not. That is much more likely. Good-bye. Be careful how you look and what you say as you go out."

When he was gone, she went back to the fireside and stood there thinking. The artist in priest's clothes had impressed on his penitent the lesson he desired, with a force many real priests might envy. As she stood by the hearth, she repeated to herself again and again, "What a lesson I have had." Then she asked to see the Mother. In the Mother's room she made a long face, and said the priest had called, and had given her a dreadful scolding. She was afraid she had been a very wicked, thoughtless young woman. She was to beg the Mother's

pardon for many things. She hoped the priest would come and see her again, but she was not sure. The Mother talked to her very earnestly for some time, during which Bourbachokátzonli had much difficulty in keeping herself from yawning.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





